

THE ARGOSY.

JUNE, 1884.

THE WHITE WITCH.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ARTIST'S SKETCH-BOOK.

GODFREY MAYNE stood still in the silent and empty church for a few moments, to collect himself. His nerves were as well under control as are those of most young men; but they had been tried, and he thought that his presence of mind had not been quite what it should have been. All his hope now was that Mary Dixon, whom he had so unceremoniously locked into the vestry, would be sensible enough to obey him and to give no token of her presence there by calling out for aid. Surely she might have seen that he was in earnest, in what he did; that there must be some good and imperative reason for it.

He watched the girl, who had been blowing the organ, go out through the church door; he heard her exclamation on suddenly finding herself confronted by Sir William Hunt, seated in the porch. He heard her say, "I beg pardon, sir," heard the tread of her thick boots on the paved pathway outside, and then he very slowly followed her. He allowed her time to cross the churchyard and go out at the gate, before he went through the church-door himself and met Sir William, who had risen to his feet, and seemed to be somewhat calmer.

"Now I will go in with you, and see this—see this singer," said Sir William, laying his hand on Godfrey's arm.

"Did you not see her just now as she passed out?" asked the young man, making his tone one of surprise.

The Baronet's agitation increased at once. "She has not passed out," said he sternly. "No one has come through this door but a young village-girl, of fifteen or sixteen."

"Exactly. But that is the nightingale. Not a bird of fine plumage, admit, but for all that —"

"Godfrey, you are jesting; you must be trying to deceive me.

VOL. XXXVII.

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What do you mean? Tell me, my boy. You would not play upon my feelings wantonly, I know: you are striving to spare me. I can bear it—I can bear it all, my dear boy: let me see her at once."

He pressed his way past the other without waiting for an answer, and, entering the church, walked quickly across to the organ. But no one was there. Godfrey hated himself for the falsehood he had told, the deception he must practise. But he saw no help for it, if he would save Mary Dixon from an awful fate which he himself could not yet understand or realise: and he braced his reluctance up to do it.

Sir William was walking about; hunting, searching, and listening. As he approached the vestry, Godfrey went forward and spoke, lest in the silence the least sound should be heard within.

"What is the matter, Sir William? Do you think the singer is so modest that she has hidden herself somewhere at the approach of a human tread? I told you that she passed you in the porch."

"Silence," said the Baronet sharply, as he tried the vestry-door. But it was locked and the key was in Godfrey's pocket. "Where is the key of this place, Godfrey?"

"The clerk keeps it, I fancy," answered Godfrey.

Sir William hesitated. Godfrey's ears were as keenly on the alert as his. But there was no sound to be heard, save that of the church-clock. The elder man was utterly non-plussed: and his suspicions were aroused.

"Godfrey, what is the meaning of this? You are playing some trick upon me; I know you are. Yes, yes, you can stare and look surprised now, but out in the porch there ten minutes ago, you were not so calm; something was the matter with you. I wondered what it was: you were agitated, restless, and you became so suddenly. Why did you tell me to stay out there while you went in? Where is the woman who was singing?"

He laid a trembling hand on the young man's arm; but Godfrey was strung up to perfect coolness. "She must be half-way home by this time, Sir William. I see you won't believe me; but just tell me this: what motive could a girl possibly have for being ashamed of a voice like that? I should hardly have thought, though, it would take so strong an effect upon a connoisseur like you."

"And do you think a connoisseur could mistake singing like that for the untrained tones of a village choir-girl? I will not leave this church until you have told me the truth."

"Do you think I have not done that already? But you are right about the training: the girl has studied at Manchester; and she lived there until lately with an aunt. People here don't seem to think much of her singing."

"But I tell you, Godfrey, I know the voice; there is a quality in it I could not mistake. I have heard it once, once before, in that same sacred song, and it lives in my memory always. I wake up and hear it at night; I shall hear it till I die."

"When did you hear the voice?" asked Godfrey. He was leaning against the great stone font, in the shadow of the oaken gallery above. He wanted to get out of the church, but Sir William was inclined to stay in it.

"I heard it—singing a light love song—just after the murder of my boy. When the love song ceased, it sang another: the sacred song we have been listening to now."

Godfrey bent his head in token of sympathy. He was burning to hear more: what connection the voice had with the murder: what connection the singer had with the murderers. But he dared not trust himself to ask, or to speak; his mouth was hot and dry, his lips were quivering. At last he spoke:

"I don't wonder the singing agitated you, if it woke such memories as that," he said, suppressing his agitation. "But the resemblance between the voices must be accidental, Sir William. The one you heard two or three years ago could not have been Janet Reade's!"

"No," assented the elder man absently. He had regained command of himself, and was sinking back into the gentle, peaceable gentleman of everyday life. But he looked full at the young man's face as he added: "Janet Reade, you say, is the name of the girl I heard singing to-day."

"Yes, and who passed you in the porch."

"Passed me in the porch? Yes, I remember. And so this is the new organ!"

He examined the instrument, and played a few bars upon it; but he did not ask Godfrey to play. Then he went about the church, glancing around him, as before.

"We must not believe in miracles now, Godfrey, must we, unless they are at least eighteen hundred years old," he said at last, slowly. "But we may believe in spirits, and in destiny, and in the power of the human will. And I choose to say, in the face of science and of all the chemists, that it is a miracle which Heaven in its mercy has performed to help me in this church to-day."

Godfrey grew cold. He answered nothing; he could not read the old man's thoughts: he dreaded to hear them put into words. But he knew that the belief Sir William had expressed at his dinner-table—that he should hear the voice again—had been fulfilled too well. Not another word, however, about the singer did Sir William say; he walked through the church from end to end and then observed that he must think of returning.

"I will not call at the Abbey now, Godfrey; I feel unnerved."

Putting his arm again within Godfrey's, Sir William led him through the churchyard and along the avenue beyond it, to the high road. The groom, on horseback, waited there, with his master's steed. Mounting, Sir William bent his face down to the younger man's, with a whisper.

"Godfrey, I have always known you to be honest and honourable,

therefore I see that some mystery lies behind this, and that you had some motive for concealing—as you must have done—that woman from me. Unless you are deceived, and she concealed herself. But you must know that singing could not have been Janet Reade's!"

He rode away, and Godfrey returned to release Mary. In the church-yard then, sauntering about to examine the tombstones, was the Wildings' artist lodger. He was at the farther end of it; but Godfrey took the precaution to shut the church-door as he entered. He fumbled with the key for some moments at the lock of the vestry-door, for it was dark about there, and he was in a fever of excitement. At last the key turned, but the door did not open. He gave it a slight push, then a rougher one; it moved a little way, and he knew there must be something against it. He forced it a little further, and put his head round to see what the obstacle was.

And it was Miss Dixon. She lay on the ground near the door; her dress had got wedged underneath and prevented its opening. With a cry of dismay, Godfrey squeezed himself through and shut the door. Had he killed her? frightened her to death? Stooping, he raised her in his arms; but in his terrible excitement he could not tell whether her heart still beat. There was a bottle of water on the table—the nice fresh water which Simpson, the clerk, changed once a month or so for the Vicar's use on Sundays. Godfrey spilt rather than sprinkled it over her, calling to her in broken whispers. When at last he saw by a faint movement that she was returning to life, a mist came before his eyes as he muttered, "Thank God!" and then he pressed his lips to hers in a long, trembling kiss that sealed him her slave for ever.

To have set Sir William on the track of this fragile woman, however innocently, was a thought so horrible that he turned sick and shuddering. For it was himself he blamed for it. He ought never to have asked her to sing after what he had heard: and when he saw Sir William making for the church at the moment he knew she was there, he should have contrived to turn him from it. As he gazed at her beautiful, wan face in bitter repentance, he formed there and then a solemn resolution: that he would make such amends as lay in man's utmost power, by henceforth striving to shield and defend her.

When she at last opened her eyes, he did not utter a word. She half raised her head and let it fall again on his arm; she felt the thrill which her unconscious movement stirred in him; and looking up at his face with terror, she rose tottering to her feet, and drew away from him.

"Don't touch me!" she cried, in a tone of pain, but with a dazed look as if she were partly wandering. "Why did you put me in here that he might see me? I had done nothing to you."

"I put you in that he might not see you," said Godfrey gently.

"Oh, how cruel you are! And to lock me in, so that I could

not get away out of his sight! There was no escape for me, no escape. I did not think you would have done it," she added tremulously, with a look that cut Godfrey to the quick.

"Listen," said he, gently. "I locked you in, when I saw the terrible effect your singing had upon him, so that he might not see you."

She had tottered to one of the two chairs the vestry contained and sat listening to him in a listless, vacant way, as if her faculties were scarcely awake yet.

"But he did see me," she said. "He looked at me through the window there and called to me by my name. I am sure it was he, though it did not look like him: I am sure it was his voice."

"Indeed, you must have fancied it. He did not come to the window at all, or look in. He was in the porch all the time, until I went away with him."

Mary put her hands to her head and gazed at Godfrey; then gazed at the window, and shuddered. "What have I been saying?" she cried, in a more collected voice, coming then only partially to her senses. "What was it that frightened me?"

"You fancied someone looked at you through the window here?"

"And was it not so?"

"On my honour, no."

She seemed bewildered. "It must have been my fancy, then! Yet why did I faint? I have never fainted more than two or three times in my life. But—why then did you hide me in here? What was it you said about—about my singing?"

"Sir William seemed to recognise it; he said he did. I thought you might not care to meet him, so I put you in here."

"*Sir William!*" she exclaimed. "Sir William Hunt? Was he here?"

"Yes," he was in the porch and heard you sing 'Angels, ever bright and fair.' He is gone back to Goule now."

"I must go home," she shivered. "I must go home to mamma."

Godfrey was advancing to open the church door, but she flew after him and clung to his arm.

"Don't go without me; don't let me go back alone," she cried breathlessly.

A lump rose in Godfrey's throat as he looked down at her frightened, beseeching face, and felt the touch of her quivering, helpless fingers.

"No, no," he answered. "Where's your hat?"

It had fallen off and lay on the floor. He put her arm within his, and led her to the door.

"You must think my conduct very foolish and mysterious, I'm afraid, Mr. Godfrey," she said, trying to get back to her usual manner. "When I am better—this evening, perhaps—I will endeavour to explain it, and ——"

"You need not," said he, gazing into her eyes with an earnestness there was no mistaking.

With a look of unutterable thankfulness, she burst into tears. Passionate words of loving comfort rose to Godfrey's lips, though he would not have spoken them, when a footstep in the porch made her start away from him. It was only the organist, coming in to practise, but it checked effectually the emotion of both. She did not take his arm again, and they returned to the Abbey almost in silence. The timid, shrinking glances she cast around convinced Godfrey that apprehension lay upon her still. Once, when a dark form was discerned moving in the plantation, she instinctively put her hand through his arm of her own accord. He stopped for a moment.

"Now, don't tremble, and don't be frightened. Sir William is two or three miles off by this time, and you are as safe from him as if you were in another county."

But though the passionate kindness in his voice and eyes had some effect upon her, his words had none: every rush of the autumn wind through the tree-tops above them made her start, and when they turned into the drive which led up to the Abbey she looked round towards the church, not with the horror of a danger past, but with an intent, searching gaze as if she expected some sight she dreaded to meet her eyes. Godfrey looked back too: there are few imaginations strong enough to conjure up visible bodily shapes in broad daylight, and it occurred to him that someone might really have climbed up to the high vestry window and looked through at her, whom she, in the uncertain light might have mistaken for the man she evidently dreaded—Sir William. Boys from the village were often in the churchyard, and all boys were mischievous. It was possible, of course, that the artist lodging at the farm, whom Godfrey had seen reading the inscriptions on the tombstones, might have looked in, but he did not think so.

When they got to the Abbey, Godfrey led her straight upstairs to the school-room door. "I'll see you safe up lest you should fall," he said, laughingly. "Now," added he, as she entered, "if you will let me advise you, you will rest for a little while and then come down and have some tea. Don't go to Mrs. Mayne at all; you know you will only disturb and frighten her: indeed, if I were you, I wouldn't talk of this to anyone."

"You are very kind to me," she sighed.

Godfrey ran downstairs, and went back to the churchyard, to examine it. There were marks on the trodden-down grass under the vestry-window, and in bits of moss newly scraped out of the crevices of the stone, showing that someone had recently climbed up the wall to the window, which was within reach of the hands by a spring from the ground. There was nobody about now, however, and no further trace of recent visitors to the churchyard except a sketch-book, which

he picked up from the grass between the square tower and the churchyard wall. The book was a new one, with no name in it and no sketches but a rough pencil outline of the Abbey, taken from this point; and a few pages further a couple of more carefully drawn diagrams, which Godfrey did not examine very closely. He remembered that Nancy had spoken of their artist-lodger as a gentleman with more taste for easy adventure than for work; and it might well have been that, idling away his time in the churchyard, he had found out that something was going on inside the church, and in an attempt to satisfy his curiosity had been the unwitting cause of Mary's fright. The vestry window was at the back of the church, the porch being in the front; so that anyone on that side would not have been visible to Sir William Hunt or himself.

Godfrey walked round the walls of the church, seeing no one; the organist was still practising inside, so he went in and glanced through the building, with the same result. Then, with the sketch-book still in his hand, he strolled down the lane by the side of the churchyard wall towards the marsh which stretched from the foot of Croxham hill away to the river. He had scarcely gone half-way down the lane when he heard the sound of a horse's hoofs below him and Dick Wilding's voice encouraging Smiler to go faster. As soon as they came in sight, Dick dismounted from his favourite, which he was riding bare-backed, and led him up the hill by a bit of rope.

"Come up, Smiler; come and fetch the master's book: come on; come up!" said he, with many cries and gestures as usual.

On seeing Godfrey he stopped short, being now only a few yards from him, and fixed his eyes on the sketch-book with a look of dismay.

"Is this what you were looking for, Dick? You can have it if you tell me who sent you for it."

But the lad was mistrustful of his enemy, and he pulled at the bit of rope nervously, without any answer, for a few moments, and then began to mutter:

"It's no good. The devil's got it; we mustn't take it, Smiler, we must go back to the master—we must go back, we must go back. He will scold us, but we can't help that."

"Now, look here, Dick," said Godfrey. "I will put this book down here; see; and you can take it back to your master the artist, and then you won't get scolded. When did he leave it in the churchyard, Dick? This afternoon, wasn't it?"

Dick nodded doubtfully; he considered parley with his enemy and Miss Dixon's enemy dangerous; he shambled hesitatingly up to the spot where Godfrey had laid the sketch-book down upon the bank, and after turning it over cautiously with one end of his finger, as if Godfrey's touch had bewitched the thing, he retreated without taking it up. Vaulting on to Smiler without another word, he rode to the bottom of the lane and disappeared round the turning by which he had come.

Godfrey shrugged his shoulders, took up the book, and slowly followed the semi-idiot down the lane. Being sure now that the owner of the sketch-book was the Wildings' lodger, he thought he would leave it at the farm on his way back and take the opportunity of reproving the lazy young artist for his impertinent curiosity; for he took it for granted, now, that the owner of the sketch-book was the cause of Mary's fright. He looked again at the pencilled outline of the Abbey, and decided that it was very poor; and at the diagrams; and he decided that the artist's sense of the picturesque was limited, since he could please himself as well in drawing ground-plans of the Abbey and the farm as in sketching the many pretty nooks that lay about Croxham woods and dales.

Godfrey got out of the lane over the edge into the wood, and made his way through the slender young trees which covered the hill on this side, among the dead leaves of autumn, up towards the farm. It was between four and five o'clock, and he found the farmer going in to tea. Nancy was at the door, looking up and down, and Godfrey asked her if the lodger was indoors, waiting until Mr. Wilding had passed into the house before questioning her.

"Yes, he is in there," said she in a low voice, nodding towards the door of the sitting-room where Mary had waited for the monk's appearance. "He's writing a letter, I believe; at least he sent Dick to me a minute ago to get the inkstand refilled. Do you want to see him?"

"Well, yes, I should like to speak to him. I don't wish to disturb him though, if he's writing letters. I'll come in after dinner."

"Won't you come in and take a cup of tea with us, and see mother, Master Godfrey? She thinks you've not treated her well lately, never coming to have a chat with her. She says she supposes you're getting too proud to remember the time when you used to sit on her knee and pull her cap off."

"That's it, Nanny; I'm getting so handsome and so clever that I can't believe I was ever a rude and tiresome little boy," answered he, laughing. "I'll come in and tell her so."

"Mr. Cattermole often comes in about this time for a chat with father, and to have some tea at our table; so you may perhaps see him," remarked Nancy. And Godfrey followed her to the large, homely day-room.

"Well, Mrs. Wilding," he began, "Nanny tells me you want me to sit on your lap and pull your cap off as I used to do. I am quite ready, but I warn you you'll find me heavier than I was fifteen years ago."

"Ah, you're just the same as ever," cried Mrs. Wilding, delighted by this brilliant pleasantry. "You always would have your joke, Mr. Godfrey. You don't come often to see me now: I was only saying to Nancy the other day that now there's ladies about the Abbey again you don't care to come and waste your time on old Nurse Wilding,

as you all used to call me—you, and Miss Isabel, and poor Master Charlie."

Nancy broke in quickly with a shrewd glance at him :

"Bless you, mother, it's not the ladies that keep him away ; it's business, is it not, Master Godfrey ? It always is business that keeps gentlemen away from places they don't care to go to."

"If you are going to be saucy, Nancy, I shall threaten to be off this minute ; and not come back again in a hurry."

"It's the women's old fault, sir, too long a tongue," spoke the farmer good-humouredly. Mr. Wilding would prose on by the hour when he could get anybody to appear to listen to him, and one of his favourite subjects was the talkativeness of women. "And Nanny has got more than her share of it ; but it's past mending now, I'm afraid. We must take them as we find them, Mr. Godfrey, as our fathers did before us."

"And with the qualities we get from our fathers," said Nancy meaningly, with a pleasant nod towards her father.

"As Mr. Cattermole says," continued the farmer, "we may think ourselves lucky when a long tongue is their worst fault ; for it's ten to one that, with all their open-hearted chatter, they are all the time thinking something quite different from what they say."

"So Mr. Cattermole says that, does he ? He goes in for being a philosopher and a cynic, I suppose ?" remarked Godfrey, turning to Mrs. Wilding, by whom he was sitting.

"I don't know, Master Godfrey, I'm sure," she answered simply. "All I've noticed about him is that he has a very good appetite and is fond of talking."

"He is Sir Oracle here now," said Nancy. "Dick follows him like his shadow, and father thinks he is the wisest man that ever lived—just for a few cheap jokes, and a good story or two picked up on his travels."

"Has he travelled far ?" asked Godfrey : remembering that many a man will say he has "travelled" if he has only crossed the Channel to France and back.

"I think he has," said Nancy : "he seems to be acquainted with a good many places. His tongue goes a good deal faster than his paint-brush, and to better purpose ; I will say that for him."

"Ah, he knows women and their ways too well to waste his time courting them, and that's why you don't like him," said the farmer to his daughter. "You should have heard him here last night, Mr. Godfrey, telling a story of how a man was wanted by the police for embezzling a large sum of money, and how they tracked him, as they thought, all the way to Marseilles ; and when they got there they found it was a woman disguised as a man that they had been following all the time, while he had quietly escaped to America. More than that, the woman managed to evade them before their very eyes, as it were, and to go out to join him there ! There's hardly a robbery

of magnitude takes place but what women have had a hand in it, he says. They're so neat and so cunning, and they seem to take to crime quite natural, if it comes in their way."

"Of course if he takes his knowledge of women out of the police reports, he can make them out as bad as he pleases without much trouble," cried Nancy, with some scorn. "But for all his cynical talk, he does not shut up his eyes or turn round and go the other way when he sees a pretty woman coming along a path to meet him."

Her father turned his head and looked at her. She seemed rather sorry she had said so much, and began cutting cake vigorously, with a flush on her bright face, after glancing at Godfrey, who returned her look curiously.

"Oh, ho! So Mr. Cattermole has two ways of talking, then: one for me, and one for you—is that it, Nanny girl?" asked Mr. Wilding.

"And one for mother, and another for Dick; and I'll be bound he'll have a different one altogether for Master Godfrey," said she, drily.

"What an interesting man he must be," said Godfrey. "I wish he would come in and show himself off in his different characters."

"It's all nonsense, Mr. Godfrey; don't you believe her," said the farmer. "Mr. Cattermole's just like anybody else, only a little more entertaining than men are in general, especially if they have not been about the world as he has. There's that to be said for most rolling stones, that they are good company; and he does not pretend to be more. I wonder why he is not coming in for some tea?"

"Perhaps he hardly likes to come if he knows that Mr. Godfrey is here," suggested the wife.

"I don't think he's troubled with shyness. I want Mr. Godfrey to hear some of his tales. He told us a long one last evening—a frightful thing. A girl, a young lady she was, killed her lover by slow doses of poison; and though it was well known to the police that she had done it, they could not bring the proofs home to her, with all their cleverness, and she got off."

"Oh, John, don't begin upon those dreadful stories!" implored Mrs. Wilding. "I can't bear them."

"But how does he know of these things?" questioned Godfrey. "Do the police tell him?"

The farmer considered. "Well, I expect so, sir."

Nancy tossed her head. "I don't suppose he knows a single policeman. He must get the accounts from a paper called the *Police News*. I have seen it in his room—with a lot of sensational pictures in it."

"To cultivate his own taste as an artist," quietly spoke Godfrey: and they all laughed.

At that moment the sitting-room door was heard to open, and Dick came in.

"Give me some tea for Mr. Cattermole, Nanny," said he in a low voice, subdued in the presence of Godfrey, whom he glanced at sideways with dislike and suspicion.

"Won't he come in, Dick?" she asked.

"No, no: he said, 'Bring me some tea here,'" answered Dick. "He's writing."

"Very well, I'll take it in to him."

"Ask him to come in here, Nancy," said her father, as she was going out. "Tell him Mr. Godfrey Mayne is here. He is a gentleman, sir," he added to Godfrey; "one can see he has been that, though he is a bit the opposite in his talk sometimes. But he's not too fine for us simple folk; as that pert lass says, he has seen enough of the world to suit himself to his company."

Nancy came back with the disappointing news that Mr. Cattermole was so busy with his letters for the post, he could not come in to tea that evening, and Godfrey left the farm with the sketch-book still in his possession. He had a feeling that the artist had avoided him through a shrewd suspicion that young Mr. Mayne had something unpleasant to say about impertinent curiosity at vestry windows. The sketch-book would serve as an excuse for another attempt to make the acquaintance of the too enterprising stranger.

"Why does your artist not like women, Nancy?" asked Godfrey, as she came to the door with him.

"I'm sure I haven't the least idea, Master Godfrey."

"Ah, I thought not. Of course a fact is enough for you, and you would not think of troubling your head about reasons. It would not occur to you to ask yourself for instance, whether this artist gentleman had been disappointed by some young lady he happened to admire, and so goes in for abuse wholesale."

"Oh, no," laughed Nancy. "It wouldn't occur to anybody who saw Mr. Cattermole; he does not give you the idea of having ever gone in for that kind of thing. He talks too ill of women to have suffered much at the hands of any one of them, or I'm much mistaken. He has his grievances, like the rest of us, but they're not of the lover's sort."

"Then of what sort are they?"

"Ah, that is asking more than I can tell."

"More than you *will* tell, do you mean?"

"Perhaps, Master Godfrey. I have never broken a confidence yet, and I'm not going to begin now."

"Then he has made you his confidant?"

"Just in a little way, sir. Not much."

"I hope you are not getting to like him: he is a stranger to you, remember," said Godfrey, gravely.

"That I am not," returned the girl heartily. "I *don't* much like him; but I am rather sorry for him."

"Possibly he suits himself to you just as he does to other people,

and tells you as many stories as he does to your father," suggested Godfrey, in mischief, now, more than for any other motive.

Nancy looked rather startled for a moment. "Well, perhaps so, Master Godfrey; but if it be so, they would affect me no more than the stories he tells my father affect him."

And it was clear that if the confidences of the versatile artist were really love-plaints, then they had indeed fallen upon stony ground.

Godfrey hunted about in the Abbey garden for a poor little late rose for Mary, but finding that it was a very unworthy present, he pulled about all the most delicate ferns in the conservatory in search of the prettiest setting of pale green he could find to enhance its meagre attractions. She might be in the drawing-room now, and he would speak just a few words of reassuring comfort, and bid her rely upon his brotherly protection always—a Christian occupation which no doubt brings its own blessing with it, but which puts certain other obligations out of one's head. The sight of the square-looking, ugly Vicarage walls through the trees at the other end of the long meadow, woke no pangs of conscience in Godfrey; his head and heart were too full of the image of one girl for another to find room there even as a foil. He passed from the garden to the refectory, to be suddenly roused to a sense of horror by the sound which broke upon his ears as he placed his fingers on the handle of the inner door. It was the voice of Sir William Hunt in the hall.

Godfrey dashed onwards, but not in time: his father and Sir William were entering the drawing-room. If Mary were in there, it was impossible to prevent the meeting. Mr. Mayne was speaking.

"Fate has been against us, but I shall be able to introduce you to my wife at last," he was saying cheerfully. "I will send Mary up to fetch her."

And they all went in.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE TRACK.

WHEN Sir William Hunt rode away after leaving Godfrey at the top of the church avenue, it was with the intention of returning to Goule Park. Presently, waking up out of reflection, he reined-in his horse; then, after some hesitation, turned and rode back, passed the Vicarage gate, and took a narrow side road to the right of it, which led to the village.

By nature a somewhat shy and lonely man, the one subject upon which his mind had fed continually during the solitary hours that he passed in his study or on horseback, or in long walks, was the murder of his eldest son. The mystery which had veiled the details of the crime from every attempt he had made to discover them; the

swiftness with which the two persons whom he knew to be implicated in it—one of whom he knew by name, the other both by name and by sight—had disappeared from Rome within a few days of the murder, leaving no trace ; had thrown a tragic interest round the matter which kept his imagination alert, and prevented the wound from healing. In a degree, time had been exercising its soothing properties ; but within the past week or two a matter had occurred to bring back all the trouble, and with renewed force.

Sir William had entered a crowded shop one day at Cheston, and while waiting to be served had caught sight of a face which he knew to be that of a woman connected with the murder of his son ; she had seen, recognised, and escaped him, in the moment when, sick with the shock, he had turned his head away and put his hand before his eyes to recover the vision which seemed to fail him at the unexpected sight of her. When he looked up, she was gone.

It had been no idle fancy ; he knew that : the face, the voice of that lady-like woman had lived in his memory and in his dreams ever since the day when he had seen her and spoken with her in Rome two years and a half ago. His hungry, fierce wish for justice upon her for her treachery, and upon one who was an accomplice for the actual crime, had been roused into active life by the sight of her fair, deceitful face. He had been so sure he was not mistaken, that he, after taking an hour for consideration, wrote to Scotland Yard to engage the services of a detective : and Sir William was beginning now rather to wonder why the officer did not make his appearance. He concluded that one, suitable to be sent down, was not at the moment at liberty ; but he looked out for him daily.

In writing to Scotland Yard, Sir William had acted in defiance of what he knew to be the wish of his pretty, tyrannical wife ; whom he was accustomed to indulge in every whim, even at the cost of his own comfort and peace. Lady Hunt had grieved much more demonstratively than her husband over her boy's death, at the time ; but now it was a sorrow past, a horror over, and she dreaded nothing so much as that Sir William should discover the guilty people, drag the terrible old story into life again, force her as it were into another long period of mourning with the freshness off, and of abstinence from the gaiety which her still youthful spirit loved. And in order to put off the evil day when her husband's morbid taste for horrors, as she considered it, should bring all these evils back upon her, she would willingly have annihilated Scotland Yard with its people, had it been in her power, until Sir William's craze should have subsided.

"Don't you wish our boy's destroyers to be punished?" Sir William asked her one day, in a tone of grieved remonstrance. "They have escaped discovery hitherto ; but you cannot, I think, wish they could escape it for ever."

"It would be so frightful an annoyance to us to have the house

overrun by detectives," she retorted, plaintively. "The servants would all give warning: and I—I'm sure I could only take to my bed."

"What nonsense you talk, Harriet!" he exclaimed, in vexation. "Who is going to fill the house with detectives? I have written for one only: and he may not enter it above once or twice, just to take my instructions. He may be here any day; to-day, for aught I know; but you may rest assured that I shall not let him prove any source of annoyance to you. If he does not make his appearance speedily, I shall write up again to know the cause of the delay. My letter may have miscarried."

Lady Hunt coughed; and then burst into tears.

This little passage-at-arms occurred the morning following their dinner-party. In the afternoon, Sir William's suspicions, that one at least of the guilty parties must be in the neighbourhood, received a confirmation when he heard—and recognised—that voice in the church, which had haunted his memory for all the intervening years. And when, on his way home, he suddenly turned his horse back, it was in obedience to the thought that he ought to try and find out at once who that singer was, what name she went by, and where she might be found. Godfrey Mayne's wish to shield the fascinating adventuress woke no particular suspicion in him: wherever she went she must of necessity make mischief, and would turn young men's hot heads in this quiet country village, just as surely as she had turned that of his own son in Rome.

As he rode along the lane leading to the village, he met Mr. Thornhill's curate; a little mean-looking, ill-shaven man, with a strong dialect which nobody could ever trace to any particular county, and was, therefore, believed by some to be the result of individual research. His sermons were full of a wordy eloquence admirably suited to an orthodox rustic congregation, for it satisfied the ear while making no demands upon the intellect. Such as he was, however, Mr. Anson was popular; his good-humoured simplicity out of the pulpit making him as much liked by the well-educated members of the congregation, whom his sermons bored, as by the ignorant villagers, whom they bewildered. He greeted Sir William Hunt, whose grave manner always frightened him, with much deference, and wished he wouldn't stop.

But Sir William did stop. "How d'ye do, Mr. Anson," he said. "Can you direct me to the house of a girl named Janet Reade? She belongs to your parish, I believe."

"Janet Reade! Oh, yes, Janet belongs to the parish, Sir William; she's a very good sort of girl. Did you want her?"

"A good, truthful girl, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; at least, I am not aware that she has been found out telling untruths. She gave a smart bit of trouble when she first came home from Manchester, was restless, and that; but since Miss Dixon

up at the Abbey has taken her in hand, she has sobered down to be as tractable and docile as anyone could wish."

"And who does she live with?—and where? Can you direct me? I want to speak with her?"

"She lives with her mother, at the turn of the road that leads to the chapel: it's a small cottage, which stands back from the rest. I'm going that way, Sir William, and shall be glad to show it to you."

Sir William walked his horse gently beside the curate, who talked fast and fluently all the time, because he was shy; they went down the hill and so on to the narrow, ill-paved pathway which led up to Mrs. Reade's cottage. Sir William left his horse with his groom, thanked Mr. Anson, said good afternoon to him, and knocked at the cottage door with the handle of his whip.

A shrill child's voice called "Mother-r-r!" and after a short delay, the door was opened by a lady in soap-suds, who looked astonished, first at the gentleman standing there, next at the waiting horses, but did not lose her self-possession. She wiped her arms and curtsied, waiting for him to speak. She did not know Sir William, but she knew the groom, and guessed who it was.

"Mrs. Reade, I believe."

"That is my name, sir. Will you walk in?"

"Thank you." He stepped into a little low-ceilinged room, almost too damply and shingly clean to be comfortable.

"I hope you'll excuse being kept at the door, sir; it's washing-day with me, and my daughter's out."

"Your daughter Janet, Mrs. Reade?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, I saw her at Croxham church to-day, and heard her sing. You have reason to be very proud of your daughter's voice," said he, looking at her very intently as he spoke.

She seemed rather surprised, as he expected. "My Janet's, sir! Well, it's none so much to boast of. There's many better voices than hers in the choir; not but what it's nice enough as far as it goes, but you can't hardly hear it a few pews off."

"Indeed! I heard a beautiful voice in the church this afternoon; I asked the name of the singer, and was told it was Janet Reade."

The woman looked puzzled. "You are very good, I'm sure, sir; but I don't think it could have been my Janet's voice that you heard."

"Has your daughter been to the church this afternoon?"

"Not that I know of, sir. They've had a half-holiday at the school, and Janet was going up to the Abbey with some work she's been doing for Miss Dixon. I expected her home before this."

"I wonder whose voice it could have been? Who is considered the best singer about here: do you know?"

"Well, let me think," said Mrs. Reade. "Polly Ricketts has

about the most voice, I think, sir, though when she sings high she's a bit squeaky, and she don't keep in tune very well. But she has a good strong voice; I'm sure it goes through your head if you're too close to her."

"Well, I don't think it could have been hers," remarked Sir William. "Are there not any ladies about here who—who go sometimes into the church to sing?"

"Not that I know of, sir. The Miss Thornhills, I b'lieve they go into it to practise. Miss Anson, the curate's daughter, she sings in the choir on Sunday, but she is away from Croxham all the week, teaching in a gentleman's family. Stay, though," added Mrs. Reade, pausing to call up a memory: "I think I did hear that for the last Sunday or two there had been a fresh voice, quite beautiful, helping in the choir. Yes, I'm sure I did; some lady staying in the place for a little while. What was her name now?"

"Try and recollect it," cried Sir William, eagerly.

"If I can, sir. Bell, was it?—Well yes, sir, I do think it was. Mrs. Bell, sir. Any way, it was some short name like that."

"*She* would not be here in her own name," thought Sir William. "'Bell' would serve as well as any other. Perhaps your daughter may be able to tell me, Mrs. Reade," he said aloud. "I much wish to know. I am Sir William Hunt."

"If she can, she will, and welcome, Sir William. She won't be many minutes now, I expect, if you'll just not mind waiting a little." She gave him the wooden arm-chair with its faded patchwork cushion, and before long the door opened, and the girl who had passed him in the porch came in.

The chair on which he was sitting had its back to the window, and was sheltered from the draught by a screen, formed of a clothes-horse, with an old table-cover tacked on to it; so that as she ran in, excited and somewhat breathless, Janet did not see the stranger.

"Oh, mother, I've got such a lot to tell you," she burst out. "Such queer things have been happening to-day. I don't know what's come to the place—or the people. First you must know ——"

"Hush, lass, this gentleman here wants to see you," interrupted the mother, in a low voice of warning, as she looked towards the screen.

The Baronet rose, startling Janet. The agitation depicted in his face, in his whole frame, when he had confronted Janet in the church porch, and put out his hand authoritatively, as if to arrest her, had scared her then. First she thought he was ill; next, that she had done something wrong, for which she was going to be punished: and she had made off with speed. The sight of him again, in her mother's cottage, gave her a shock, and she stood nervously before him, after dropping a curtsey, as much perplexed by his unexpected appearance as she had been by Miss Dixon's abrupt departure at the church, and by Mr. Godfrey Mayne's disturbed manner.

"The gentleman wants to know if you were up at the church to-day, Janet," continued her mother.

"Oh, I am satisfied on that point already," said he, smiling reassuringly as he saw the effect the sight of him had upon the girl. "I met you coming out of the church, did I not?"

"Yes, sir," said Janet.

"And the gentleman wants to know who it was singing," added Mrs. Reade.

Janet looked up at him and saw how deep his anxiety on the point was, and she did not at once answer. Something was evidently wrong. After a moment's consideration, during which she could see that his hungry eagerness for her reply grew every moment keener, she spoke.

"Didn't you see her go out through the porch just before me, sir?"

"No; no one came out. Mr. Godfrey Mayne went in, and soon after you came through, but not anyone else."

Janet was a sharp lass. Why was he asking this?—why did the gentleman want to know? The girl had shrewd insight, and she immediately began to think that all this might bode ill to her good friend Miss Dixon. Perhaps the young lady had been at the organ without permission, and was going to be called to account for it? Well, she, Janet, would baffle them if she could.

"You were blowing, were you not?" said Sir William.

"Yes, sir."

"Who was it for?"

"A stranger," boldly replied the girl, for whose veracity the Reverend Mr. Anson had been ready to speak. "Some lady came up to me in the church avenue this afternoon, and asked would I go into the church and blow for her: she wanted to try the organ, she said."

"But don't you know who the lady was?"

"No, sir. I went in with her as she asked me, and when she had finished the piece she sang, she got up, and I suppose she went away, for I did not see any more of her. Mr. Godfrey Mayne, he came in then; I asked him where the lady was, and he said she was gone."

Miss Janet related all this—which was partly true and partly not—with so glib and ready a tongue that she evidently had the making in her of a very correct young woman. The Baronet looked at her searchingly.

"Do you not know the lady's name?"

"I might have heard it, sir; I don't remember."

"Is she young, or old?"

Janet reflected. "Well—maybe—thirty, or so."

"Janet's not to be depended on one bit, sir, when it comes to the judging of age," put in Mrs. Reade. "A person that she'll call thirty is as likely to be not more than twenty, or just the other way—a good forty. Janet, child, was it that lady who has been stopping in the

place for a week or two, and sang at church one Sunday? I can't call her name to mind for certain—unless it's Bell."

"Perhaps it was her," replied Janet.

"But you'd know her, shouldn't you?" said Mrs. Reade quickly. "A nice-looking lady in puce silk, who was lodging somewhere in the village for a week or so, 'twas said."

Janet telegraphed to her mother a warning look to be quiet. Sir William observed it. He thought the girl must be afraid of him, and afraid to answer.

"The voice I heard in the church this afternoon was much like that of a lady I met abroad, but whom I have not seen for a long time; I thought it might be the same," he explained, to put Janet at her ease. "That is why I am asking you. Did you not hear how beautiful the voice was?"

"Yes, I did, sir. I thought I had never heard such a voice."

"Did you never hear her sing before?"

"No, sir; never."

"But did she never ask you to blow for her before, Janet?" put in Mrs. Reade.

"No, mother, she never did."

"And can't you tell, child, whether, the name was Mrs. Bell?"

"I can't tell a bit," replied Janet, dogged obstinacy in her tone.

Sir William saw clearly he should get no satisfactory information here; and he went away from the cottage with an impression that the girl was purposely withholding it.

Determined to find out more for himself if possible, he walked slowly down the road in thought, signing to the groom to follow with the horses. Some way onward, he met two little girls in pinafores and sun bonnets; they looked tidy, and Sir William judged rightly that they belonged to the school. He stopped and questioned them, patting them in a pleasant, fatherly manner.

"Does Janet Reade go to school," he asked.

"Yes, but she's one of the big ones," answered the elder of them, a child of seven.

"I wonder if I've got a halfpenny about me?" said the Baronet.

"Do you like gingerbread, little ones?"

The sparkling young eyes answered him, without words.

"Did you happen to see Janet Reade go into the church this afternoon?" he continued, diving in his pockets.

"Yes," spoke up one of the eager children. "Janet went in there with the White Witch."

"With the—who did you say?" questioned Sir William, not quite catching the words. "Was it a lady that Janet went in with?"

"It was the White Witch," repeated the child.

"The White Witch? Why, what's that? There; there's a halfpenny apiece for you. And now tell me what you mean by the White Witch."

"She's the White Witch," again said the child.

Sir William paused. "Is she a lady?"

"Yes."

"Who is she? Where does she live?"

"She lives at the Abbey."

"At the Abbey!" cried Sir William, feeling all abroad. "Why do you call her by that name—the White Witch?"

"'Cause she is. We see her all in white up at the Abbey the day o' the storm. She frightened us all."

"Do you know her name, children?"

"No, sir," answered the child.

"And you saw her go into the church this afternoon with Janet Reade?"

"I see her: they went in along o' one another."

At that moment the little curate came out of a cottage hard by, where he had been paying a pastoral visit. Sir William turned to him; while the children, making use of the opportunity, tore away in the direction of the gingerbread shop, as if a mad bull were after them.

"Can you explain to me what on earth those little ones mean, Mr. Anson?" questioned the Baronet. "I was asking them about a lady who went into the church to sing to the organ this afternoon, and they call her the White Witch."

"Silly little geese!" exclaimed Mr. Anson, with a passing laugh, as he went on to explain to Sir William that it was Miss Dixon they had alluded to, and how the name had been earned.

"She is indeed a white witch; a lovely and a charming one," added the curate in the honest admiration of his heart. "Miss Dixon has won her way with us all, Sir William, high and low."

Sir William seemed to see less solution to his doubts than before. This young lady, Mr. Mayne's step-daughter, could not have anything to do with the one he was striving to discover. For the first time he asked himself whether he could have been mistaken in supposing that the voice in the church was the voice that had so long haunted his memory.

"Does Miss Dixon sing, do you know?" he abruptly asked.

"I think not," replied the Curate; "I never heard that she did."

"Do you chance to know anything of a Mrs. Bell—or some such name—who does sing; and who is, I hear, staying at Croxham?"

"Bell?—Bell?" repeated the Curate, reflecting. "There was a lady here for a week or two, and I think that was her name. I don't know anything of her. She is now gone, I believe."

Sir William thanked the little man, mounted his horse, and rode away in the direction of the Abbey. He thought that Miss Dixon, whom he did not suspect of being the singer herself, might have seen the singer in the church. If it should turn out that Miss Dixon was the singer, of course it would be a proof that he was mistaken in thinking it to be the voice he had heard at Rome. It was getting

rather late to make a call ; but Sir William was impatient, and he and Mr. Mayne had been friends too long to stand upon ceremony with one another. So he spurred his horse onwards.

He had just passed a turning in the road which brought him to the foot of a gentle rise called Croxham Hill, when he saw, somewhat to his surprise, his own carriage speeding down it. Sir William checked his horse, and waited until it came up.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BAFFLED.

SIR WILLIAM signed to the coachman to stop ; and Lady Hunt, who was alone in the carriage, looked out to see what was the matter. The first glance at her husband's face showed her that something was wrong.

"What is it, William ? What has happened ?"

"Nothing. I only stopped to tell you that I may not be home quite so early as usual. I am going to call at the Abbey."

"At the Abbey ? Now ? Where have you been ? You said when you started you were going to call at the Abbey then."

"Yes : but in passing the church it occurred to me that I had promised to go in and hear the new organ, so I thought I might as well go then ; I might not again have so good an opportunity ; and I left my horse with James, and walked to it, trusting to my luck to see Godfrey Mayne about, or perhaps one of the Thornhill girls, to play it for me."

"And did your luck serve you ?" enquired Lady Hunt, with a smile.

"Yes, so far," he replied gravely. "I came upon Godfrey in the churchyard."

"And what do you think of it ?—He played for you ?"

"No."

"How mysterious you are ! William, I know what it is !" she suddenly cried. "When you look in this solemn way, you are sure to be thinking of that past trouble. Have you heard anything fresh ?"

Sir William bent down to put his head inside the carriage-window, and answered in a cautious whisper. "I think I have. Harriet, I think I have heard this afternoon in Croxham Church the very self-same voice that lured our boy to his dreadful end."

Lady Hunt flung her hands up before her face. "Oh William, how can you ? These fancies are getting to be quite a mania. First, you see a face in a shop——"

Sir William withdrew his head ; signed to his groom to come up to take his horse, and to the footman to open the carriage door. "Let the carriage walk about quietly," he said to the latter, as he took his seat opposite to his wife, and bent towards her.

"I tell you, Harriet, it is neither fancy nor mania," he said, impressively, as the coachman began, in obedience to orders, to walk his horses up and down. "I have heard a woman sing this afternoon to the organ in Croxham church, and from my soul I believe it to be the same woman I heard sing that time in Rome. It was the same song, 'Angels, ever bright and fair : ' the very same."

"And its being the same song, must have misled you," reasoned Lady Hunt. "You have never heard the song since, for you have kept yourself out of the way of singing, and hearing it now must have given rise to the notion that it was the same singer. What was the woman of this afternoon like?"

"I did not see her." Bending closer, until his face nearly touched his wife's, Sir William gave her a brief history of the events. It but confirmed Lady Hunt in her opinion—that her husband's fancy had misled him into the belief he took up, and that the singer had been but an ordinary singer, probably the girl he mentioned, Janet Reade.

"William, do give up this endeavour to rake up the old story and making yourself miserable and everybody else uncomfortable, all to no purpose!" she cried. "You can't bring the poor boy to life again; and what good can revenge do you?"

"As much as a season in town, or any of the things which in your idea make life worth living, can do you," he rejoined. "I have lived for nothing else for these few past years, and I am not going to let my chance slip now."

Poor little Lady Hunt looked exceedingly miserable and rather frightened, as she glanced at her husband's stern, grave face.

"I regretted and mourned our boy just as much as you did, William; you know that; and the manner of his death overwhelmed me with a feeling of horror which I have never quite got over. I shrink from its being renewed now; shrink from it with a dread that you can hardly understand. If you would but spare me!"

"My dear Harriet, if I thought there was anything to spare you from, I would do it," he answered. "But there really is not. The investigation will not touch you in the least."

"I have always thought that the matter was unpardonably mismanaged at the time, or the people would have been taken then," she said.

"The people were cunning, and escaped."

"Yes; but they should not have been let escape. Still, as that was so, better let it rest now, for good and all."

"You know, Harriet, that ever since that time of their escape and our useless search after them, I have been trying to track those people," he persisted. "Never once, in all this weary time, have I come upon the slightest trace of them until within the last week or two. Now the traces seem to be opening out. And you would have me abandon it altogether!"

"I would. I feel that it will bring I know not what of trouble.

If it would restore our boy to life only for an hour, I would not object; I should be as eager for their discovery as you are. But it will not; you know it will not. And I do believe it is only your fancy. Oh William, if you would but indulge me in this—and not send to Scotland Yard!"

"Why, I have sent," he returned quickly. "You are forgetting. My letter went up days and days ago." And Lady Hunt turned her face aside from his gaze, and tapped her foot petulantly upon the carriage mat.

"Think how unpleasant it will be for us to have the household upset by London police officers, and the servants thinking of nothing but mysteries, and screaming, and paying no attention to one's orders! It will bear quite a disreputable appearance to have detectives about us, William! What will the neighbours say?"

"Well, it seems hopeless to get you out of looking upon it in this foolish light," sighed Sir William. "See here, Harriet: I will write up to Scotland Yard this evening, and tell them not to let the man they send down present himself at the Park. He can put up at the King's Arms at Cheston, and I will go to him there."

"No, William, don't do that," she said in quick alarm; "don't write up to the place again: let it be. But what is it that is taking you to the Abbey now?"

"I thought you understood. If Mrs. Mayne's daughter was in the church this afternoon, she may have seen the singer, and be able to tell me who she is, and what she's like. Some person calling herself Mrs. Bell has been staying at Croxham; it may be she."

Pulling the check-string, for the carriage to stop, Sir William left it, got upon his horse, and continued his way to the Abbey. As he cantered up the avenue, he saw a girl running across the long meadow, also making for the Abbey. He had time to recognise Janet Reade, and the sight of her confirmed his suspicion that she was in some way keeping him in the dark. A thought darted into his mind—was the person who had been at the organ, who had that glorious voice, staying at the Abbey; some temporary visitor? And was this the reason that Godfrey, perhaps in pure boyish mischief, had tried to mystify him?

Miss Dixon's manner to her inferiors and to children was especially charming. Not with the soft, subtle charm that distinguished Mrs. Mayne's; Mary's was the innate, genuine, and loving sympathy that wins its way to all hearts. She had gained those of the school-children: they might call her from custom the White Witch yet, but it was a witch they admired and adored. Janet Reade loved her more than anybody else in the world. Miss Dixon had stood up for Janet in a trouble the girl had brought upon herself at school, and had contrived to rectify it without exposure, and Janet overflowed with devotional gratitude. When Janet was on her way to the Abbey that afternoon to take home some needlework she had been doing, and Miss Dixon

met her in the church avenue and asked her if she would go into the church and blow the organ for her for half an hour, the girl was ready and willing. Afterwards, upon the conclusion of Sir William Hunt's visit to her mother's cottage, Janet, believing that his cross-questioning must arise from Miss Dixon's having played the new organ without leave, started away by a side route to the Abbey, to crave an audience of the young lady and inform her of what had occurred.

As the girl made for the back entrance, Sir William got off his horse at the front. Mr. Mayne was in the garden, his fresh, healthy face glowing in the red light of the sun, now nearing its setting. The two old friends met cordially.

"Called to see Mary! To be sure, Hunt. Come in; come in. She is in the drawing-room, and she shall fetch my wife down," reiterated Mr. Mayne.

Godfrey, as already told, came rushing into the hall from the direction of the refectory; but not in time to arrest the opening of the drawing-room door. Indeed, how could he have done it?

"Halloa, Mary's not here!" cried Mr. Mayne. "Nobody's here. Walk in, Hunt."

Godfrey shook hands with Sir William effusively, as if he had not seen him for years, instead of having left him, an hour or so ago, rather offended, at the end of the Church Avenue. The young man was off his head with joy and relief, at finding that Mary was not visible. Sir William, on the other hand, was cold and grave.

"I wonder where they've got to?" Mr. Mayne went on. "My wife was lying down, but I should think she is up now: Mary must be with her. Run up, Godfrey, and ask them both to come down; tell them Sir William is here."

"Pray don't disturb Mrs. Mayne on my account," said Sir William. "I have been rather unlucky in not making her acquaintance yet; but you must not disturb her for me."

"Nonsense; it will rouse her and do her good," said Mr. Mayne briskly. "I think ladies fall ill to vary the monotony of life in the country; I do, indeed; it is a bad habit, and we ought not to encourage it."

"Does Miss Dixon sing?" asked Sir William.

"Sing?" Mr. Mayne echoed, rather wondering at the abrupt question. "No. I have never heard Mary sing in all my life. Why?"

"I heard a voice in the church this afternoon. I thought perhaps it was Miss Dixon's."

"Oh no; she does not sing. Godfrey, why don't you go?" repeated Mr. Mayne, for the young man had disregarded the previous injunction. "My wife has not quite got over the indisposition that prevented her from going to your house last night, Hunt, but I'm sure she will come down to see you."

Godfrey moved lazily towards the door. "Shall we see you and

Lady Hunt at the Underwoods' ball to-morrow night, Sir William?" he asked.

"No; my wife has declined," replied Sir William. "We expect Eustace home to-morrow, ill, and she will not leave him. As for me, I no longer take pleasure in balls. You are all going, I suppose?"

"I believe so," replied Godfrey.

There was a moment's silence. Sir William glanced at the clock.

"Godfrey, unless you go and see after them, I shall," said his father: which sent the young man from the room.

Godfrey made his way to the schoolroom, determined to tell Mary who it was that wanted her, and then to let her use her own discretion about appearing. If she declined, he would carry back some plausible plea of excuse to Sir William. Knocking at the door, and getting no answer, he turned the handle and looked in. A girl was standing at one of the windows, and he saw that it was Janet Reade. She curtsied to him, but looked confused, and said nothing.

"Did you not go home when I saw you leave the church, Janet?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And you have come back here since! What is it that you have come for?" he continued, suspicious and curious.

"I—I came to speak to Miss Dixon, sir."

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes, she has," interrupted Mary, as she opened the door of her own room and came out, white to the lips. But her disordered hair had been re-arranged and the tear-stains on her cheeks washed away. "Janet has seen me, and I have now done with her.—I am much obliged to you, Janet; you need not wait. I shall see you to-morrow."

The girl left the room, curtsying to them both. Mary turned to Godfrey, trying to speak in her usual manner.

"Why do you look so—so put out?"

"Oh, it's nothing," he replied. "Are you going down?"—for she was turning to the door. "There is some one in the drawing-room."

"Yes," said she, with a steadfast face, but in which he read a resolution of despair. "Sir William Hunt, is it not?"

"It is."

"He must have come straight here from Janet Reade's."

"From Janet Reade's!" repeated Godfrey.

"Yes. He has been making enquiries of her there about—about the owner of my voice. I must—I suppose—satisfy him."

"No, no!" said Godfrey, warmly; "you shall not see him, or satisfy him either, if you do not wish to. You think, I expect, that it was Sir William who looked at you through the vestry window, but I can assure you that it was not. I have found out who it was."

Mary gazed at him, her eyes wild with fear.

"Don't look like that," he said, wondering at her terror, yet believing it must arise from the nervousness left by the fright in the afternoon. "It was only that artist who is lodging at the Wildings': an idle scamp of a fellow, according to Nancy. I found his sketch-book lying on the grass in the churchyard: a pretty sure proof that it was he. I took it to the farm to give back to him."

"You saw him, then?" asked Mary, as she rallied her courage.

"No; he was writing letters. I think he guessed what I had come to say to him. I shall give him a strong hint that he had better check his prying propensities."

"Don't do that," said she, quietly. "It must have been a mere freak of idle curiosity, nothing more: anybody has a right to look through a church window. It was extremely foolish of me to be startled. I did not even see him, or what he was like. All I saw was a man's hat and grey hair suddenly appear above the window-sill; and then I thought I heard myself called to, which must have been imagination —"

"Of course it was," interrupted Godfrey.

"Yes. You had frightened me, to begin with, by locking me into the vestry in that sudden manner, and I suppose this other fright, coming upon that, overweighted me, and caused me to faint. Pray do not reprove the man: it would be turning a trifle into a matter of importance."

"Very well; perhaps you are right; and I will hand his sketch-book over to Nancy. Have you met this artist about the place?" added Godfrey, recalling what Nancy had told him about Miss Dixon's likeness.

"Not that I know of," she replied. "I don't care to meet strangers about the fields. If I see one coming I turn another way."

"Quite right."

"Now I come to think of it, I may have seen him," resumed Mary. "Yesterday, when I was walking out with your father, we met a man in the corn-field. It did not occur to me to think it was the artist, but it may have been. I noticed that he looked at us both very attentively while he was at a distance, and turned his head away while he passed us. I wonder if it was he?"

"What was he like?"

"A shortish man. At least he looked short, compared with Mr. Mayne. He had a lot of grey hair and, I think, grey whiskers. But, seeing that it was nobody I knew, I did not take much notice of him. He was rather big about the shoulders."

"Well, that's not at all a bad description of the artist," remarked Godfrey. "No doubt it was he. Was it the same man whose head appeared at the window this afternoon?"

"I cannot say. I hardly saw that man at all. He did not look like anyone I knew. It was the suddenness of the head's appearing

there, and fancying I heard my name, that startled me. And now," added Mary, "I will go down stairs to be introduced to Sir William."

She was passing outside. Godfrey arrested her.

"No, no, pray do not: if you would rather avoid him."

"Why should I avoid him?" she sharply retorted, as one in pain: and she walked swiftly along the gallery.

At that moment, Mrs. Mayne's door opened, and the sweep of her silk gown was heard passing towards the head of the staircase. "Mamma! mamma!" called out Mary, in a covert tone of terror.

"Let your mother go down," whispered Godfrey. He was wonderfully curious to see the meeting between Mrs. Mayne and Sir William.

Mary's face was quite convulsed with fear. "Mamma, mamma, come back," she cried; and, breaking from Godfrey's detaining hand, she flew to her mother, who had descended a step or two, and caught forcible hold of her.

Mrs. Mayne turned her head. "Why, what is it, Mary?" she cried, seeing the startled face of her daughter, and the impassive one of Godfrey. "I am only going to the drawing-room for some tea," she added, tranquilly. "I have been having a nice long sleep and feel ever so much better."

"Don't go—you must not go," pleaded the girl. "Some one is there."

The drawing-room door was opening; and now the elder lady took fright in earnest. Mr. Mayne was coming in search of her. She wheeled round too quickly, and perhaps the clinging grasp of Mary somewhat impeded her movements, and she uttered a faint cry. Mrs. Mayne had twisted her foot.

Godfrey helped her back to her room; Mary followed, wringing her hands. Mr. Mayne arrived to hear of, almost to have witnessed the disaster. After expressing his sorrow, he went back to Sir William.

"She was in the very act of coming down on purpose to see you," said Mr. Mayne, catching up the version he had received, and explaining his wife's mishap. "It is very unfortunate, Hunt: just as if fate were putting a veto against your meeting."

"I am truly sorry," said Sir William, unsuspiciously. "I shall not, then, see Miss Dixon either?"

"Not to-day; she is with her mother," interposed Godfrey. "Another time, Sir William."

Sir William Hunt, saying good-bye, went out to his horse, and rode away, baffled. By "Fate," or by Mrs. Mayne.

(To be continued.)

PERSONAL EQUATIONS.

IN astronomy the small corrections which must be made to secure accurate predictions are called equations. One of these corrections depends on the difference in the observing power of different individuals. One man will note with more accuracy than another the precise moment when any phenomenon occurs. After all corrections are made to the fact seen, another must be added, on account of peculiarity in the person seeing it. This is called the personal equation.

But a personal equation is not to be allowed for merely in reference to astronomical calculations.

Every man has a favourite point of view from which he sees things. We see but what we bring with us—the power of seeing; and this power is hampered by preoccupation and prejudices of all kinds. Two persons looking at the same object may carry away perfectly different, and even opposite, impressions. Ask one who has been looking into the window of a shop containing a large assortment of miscellaneous articles what he has seen, and the answer given will reveal a good deal as to the profession, character, and tastes of the person interrogated. So, too, in walking through a picture gallery, people only stop in front of the pictures that suit themselves.

Several travellers, journeying together, reach the summit of a hill and look down into a valley stretching far away before them. One is an artist and he sees the picturesque character of the scene. He notices lights and shadows; lovely streaks of sunshine on the green meadow; black shadows on the hills. Another is a wood-cutter. He notices the timber, and can tell you its quality and value. A third is a geologist, and he sees the stratification of the rocks, the terraces deposited by the retiring waters, or marks of glacial action. A fourth is a general, and he notices at a glance the strategic points, the commanding summits, the opportunities for moving cavalry and infantry. Still another is an historian, and to him the landscape is living with recollections of the past. Meantime, the horses of these travellers notice nothing but the grass. A lady and a clergyman are looking at the moon together. "The figure in the moon," suggests the clergyman, "seems to me to resemble the spire of a cathedral!" "How strange," replies the lady, "for to me there appears to be in the moon two figures. One is like a lover bending over his lady-love." The personal equation of each of these persons suggested their respective visions.

Almost everything has a pleasant as well as an unpleasant side, and it is possible for everyone to acquire the habit—which, according to

Dr. Johnson, is worth ten thousand a-year—of looking at the bright side of things. Well for ourselves and friends if our personal equation have acquired a bent in this direction. Many persons, in travelling, seem bent on seeing only what is disagreeable. On the same trip you may meet both classes of travellers. One is complaining of the dust, the noise, the disagreeable people. Another cannot go half a dozen miles without meeting some agreeable companion or some interesting adventure. We once travelled with an old bachelor who was much disappointed with the Alps. Why? He saw them not! for he was thinking of, and boring us about, those pills he had forgotten in Paris! So it is, that however lovely nature may be around us, and however happy the circumstances of our lives ought to make us,

'We receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live.'

All depends on the attitude of our mind and heart; in a word, upon our personal equation.

The pessimist believes that "it is better to stand than to walk; better to sit than to stand; better to lie down than to sit; better to sleep than to wake; better is a dreamless sleep than dreams; death is better than even a dreamless sleep; and never to have been is the best of all." Another man with less reason in the outward circumstances of his life, is led by his personal equation to become an optimist. He takes a rose-water view of everything, believes that this is the best of all possible worlds, and returns daily thanks for his creation.

"To see is to have," says a French proverb. The owner of an estate may not be its real possessor; for he may be unable to enjoy it. A millionaire pays thousands of pounds for a gallery of paintings, and some boy or girl comes in, with open mind and poetic fancy, and carries away a treasure of beauty which the owner never saw. All depends upon personal equation. True happiness comes from within and not from without. It is made, not found.



A STUDENT.

"MY DEAR COUSIN HOWARD,—I hear from Alice that you are about to leave your lodging on the moor, and from her description of the place I think it would suit me perfectly. I want a *very* quiet house with no other lodger. I must read hard during July and August.

"I have just got a splendid vertical section of the petal of the *digitalis purpurea*, and I am quite sure you are right about the total cessation of activity in the chlorophyll before the appearance of the pigment. However, Dr. Bond maintains his own opinion still.

"Will you arrange for me to take your rooms, if you think they will suit? I should like to go down on Thursday.

"Ever your affectionate cousin,

"F. EVELYN."

"Hum!" said Mr. Evelyn, as he cracked his egg and finished this epistle. "The place is quiet enough; only what is up now, I wonder? 'Read hard'—always the way. Well, I'll take the rooms—I'm sorry enough to leave them myself."

He looked through the quaint, diamond-paned window out on the wide stretch of rugged moor, the free far-reaching sweep of heather-clad earth and lichen stone; and sighed to think that to-morrow he must leave the lonely majesty of this quiet place for the civilised noisy dulness of his London chambers.

"Mrs. Peters," he called, hearing a step in the passage.

"Yes, sir," answered his landlady, opening the door. "Good-morning, sir."

"A beautiful morning, Mrs. Peters. It makes me hate to go back to London, and leave such weather behind."

"Indeed, sir, I'd be sorry for anyone to stop enjoying themselves; and if you like to stay, why, the rooms b'aint taken yet."

"Ah! I wish I could. But I want to engage the rooms, Mrs. Peters, if you've no objection. A young cousin of mine, a great student, wants to come down here for July and August. I suppose you have no one in view—what has happened to Mr. Anson?"

"He's gone to Switzerland, sir, I think. Anyway, he hasn't taken the rooms this summer, I'm sorry to say. But for any friend of yours, Mr. Evelyn, I'll do my best, and I can say no more."

"Well, my cousin authorises me to take the rooms if you can give them. Let me see: I leave to-morrow. Could you have the rooms ready by Thursday?"

"Certainly, sir, and I'm obliged to you."

"Then I'll be back about four, and I shall be pretty hungry, Mrs. Peters. You won't forget to tell Jack about my portmanteau?"

"That will be all right, sir."

So Mr. Evelyn donned a light overcoat and a broad-brimmed hat, and equipped with tin box and umbrella went forth for his last botanical ramble on Dartmoor.

Mrs. Peters returned to her kitchen with a light heart, for she was burdened with a rheumatic husband, and their income from the little farm was so small that she was much beholden for winter maintenance to the sum she earned by letting her two best rooms in the summer months. But Chagleigh was far from any town and bordered the wildest part of the moor, and these circumstances, which lent it great attractions in Mr. Evelyn's eyes, hindered less retiring visitors from taking up their abode at the farm-house.

"Thomas, there's a young gentleman, a cousin of Mr. Evelyn's, coming down to take the rooms. He's a great student, and he'll stay for two months!"

"Hope a'll pay ef a's a book-larned lad," growled ungrateful Thomas.

"Now, Thomas Peters, I'm ashamed! Instead of kneeling down—well, that you can't do, poor dear—but thanking the good Lord. Of course he'll pay!"

"An how's Maister Hanson to stop yere too, then?" continued ungrateful Thomas, as a shadow darkened the doorway. "For yere he be!"

"Mr. Anson, my dear!" cried Mrs. Peters, staring aghast at the new-comer. "Wherever did you come from? To think of it! If I ever thought you were coming here this day! How did you come, sir?"

"Why, I walked over from Teighmoor this morning, Mrs. Peters," replied Mr. Anson. "Didn't you get a letter from me a week ago?" And he seated himself on the kitchen settle with the air of one who knew he was welcome.

"Never heard a word about you, sir, since Mrs. Bayle told me you were going to Switzerland."

"Well, old Martin must have the letter in his hat or one of his pockets then, for I wrote several days ago. But I hope you can take me in?"

Mrs. Peters did not usually speak with a Devon accent. But none but a genuine daughter of Devon could have put as much dismay and grief into a single syllable as she did.

"My *de*—ar! Whatever shall we do? Only this very morning I let the rooms to a gentleman from up the country, thinking you weren't coming."

"That's bad—for me," returned Mr. Anson. "But I suppose what must be, must be."

"No, Mr. Anson, it mus'n't. I'll tell Mr. Evelyn the gentleman can't have them. You have the best right, sure."

"You had better take in the stranger, I think. I am at best only an uncertain bird. Take him in and do for him, Mrs. Peters: I'll go over to Teighmoor again till I find a place."

"Dear, dear! You must be nearly starved. I'll get you some breakfast first, and then I'll step over to Mrs. Blake's and see what sort of accommodation she's got. Would you like to try her, Mr. Anson? I hear she's a clean, thrifty body."

"Aye, if she could have me. I really don't care where my tent is pitched—only that I would rather be here. But I don't believe Mrs. Blake's heavy-cake can come up to yours, Mrs. Peters."

"Well, she's a tidy body and does her best," said the gratified hostess, generously. "And if you are not comfortable, you've only to tell me, and I'll find you a place you'll like. I was beginning to think this new young gentleman would be company for you, but I don't know."

"I'll come and see what he's like, anyhow. If he doesn't want society we shall easily find it out. I dare say he doesn't, coming down here."

At this moment the cart carrying Mr. Anson's luggage from Teighmoor came into the yard. It was discovered that a portable easel was missing, and as the boy declared he had brought every article he received, there was nothing for it but that Mr. Anson should set out again after breakfast, and walk the seven miles to Teighmoor.

"I'll call at Mrs. Blake's on my way, Mrs. Peters," said he. "Meanwhile, the luggage can remain here, if you will be so good. Tell Mr. Evelyn I was sorry not to meet him. I shall sleep at Teighmoor to-night." And away went the young artist over the moor.

Mrs. Blake had rooms at Mr. Anson's disposal; Mrs. Blake promised to do her best for the young gentleman; and Mr. Anson took up his abode in her dwelling, about a mile from his old quarters at Chagleigh Farm.

II.

THE Wednesday intervening between Mr. Evelyn's departure and the arrival of his cousin, was occupied by Mrs. Peters in cleansing as thoroughly as possible the apparently spotless furniture, and in making other preparations for her new guest. She confided to her husband a sort of dislike to the young man, and several times expressed her sorrow that she was not getting the apartments ready for Mr. Anson. For three summers he had spent July under her roof, but some uncertainty as to his movements had now unfortunately arisen, and she was compelled to send him away.

For all her vexation, she surveyed with much pleasure the neat rooms that shone with hand polish on wood and metal, as she awaited the arrival of the stranger.

"He can't say they're not clean, anyhow," was her satisfied comment.

The sound of wheels drew her to the door; whence, however, after one brief glance she suddenly retreated, and much surprised her husband by rushing into the kitchen and exclaiming:

"Land's sake alive, Thomas! The new young gentleman's a lady!"

"Yes, I like the lodgings very much," said Miss Evelyn pleasantly, when Mrs. Peters brought up the tea that was to have regaled the imaginary young gentleman. "But I find the windows do not open at the bottom. How do you ventilate the rooms?"

"Mr. Evelyn used to have them just as they are, miss," answered Mrs. Peters, a little hurt. "He never complained."

"Oh, then, never mind; I dare say I can manage." And the young lady smiled so brightly that Mrs. Peters left the room with a less wrathful heart than she had borne during the interview. But she told her husband that Miss Evelyn was full of whims and fancies; and she for one didn't want to have the house blown out of window by draughts; adding several other remarks which showed that the lady-lodger was not likely to become such a favourite with the good woman as her cousin had been.

The next morning Miss Evelyn unpacked a very heavy box, which proved to be nearly full of books. These she established in rows on the only table, and in answer to Mrs. Peters' puzzled request for a place on which to lay the cloth, she cleared about two feet square, and intimated that not another inch could be appropriated for any purpose whatever. Several photographs in light frames were scattered about the room, and a gay Indian shawl was spread, in a fantastic manner, over the low, broad window seat. An easy chair which had arrived with the luggage stood by the window, and a reading-easel was placed in front of it. The little room, though with such slight touches, was completely transformed, and the most effective object in it was its occupant, whose personal appearance shall be described later on.

"I should like to have dinner every day at one o'clock, Mrs. Peters, and tea at five. Then I shall not require anything more from you till breakfast time. And I should like breakfast not later than eight."

Mrs. Peters was half inclined to reply that Mr. Evelyn never required his breakfast till half-past nine, but a glance at the calm face "took it out" of her, as she told her husband. She was an excellent cook, but she disliked being tied to time, and the idea of a lady's arranging things in this manner was rather distasteful to her.

Meanwhile the young artist made himself very comfortable at Mrs. Blake's, as was his custom wherever he located himself. He was as fond of fishing as of painting, and he spent many hours by the trout-stream, looking for "effects," he said; though his effects were mostly in the shape of the shining beauties with which he not infrequently filled his basket.

He was of an imaginative turn of mind, and amused himself, during the lonely hours of his first days on the moor, by speculations about the man who had so suddenly usurped his rooms at Chagleigh. He sketched several interviews, during which he and the student became fast friends, and his lively invention had surrounded the unknown with a halo of romance as he decided to send the spoils of the day to Mrs. Peters, with a request that she would cook them for the evening meal of her guest. So it happened that when Miss Evelyn sat down to tea, half-an-hour after her arrival at the farmhouse, some delicious trout appeared on the table. Mrs. Peters, in her "flustrification," as she afterwards explained, forgot to mention the donor, and so the young artist's gift was not received with the gratitude he intended it to inspire.

"I shouldn't ask for a more delicate attention," said he, as he looked lovingly at the gift before sending it, "than four fine trout. And very probably he won't care about pleasures of the appetite."

I am bound to say, however, that the recipient much enjoyed a part of the present, and wondered if Mrs. Peters could possibly make her lodgings pay, providing such delicacies for her guests.

III.

ON the second day after Miss Evelyn's arrival, Harry Anson determined to pay a visit to the student.

"I'll talk about old Evelyn," said the cheerful youth to himself, as he walked through the heather and bracken to the farm. "I dare say he's nervous; reading men always are. There was Lynch of Balliol. How he shook when a fellow spoke to him! But I'll be very free-and-easy; that's what shy fellows like; and I'll tell him I loved his cousin like a father. I wonder how he spends his time. I mustn't let him sit over his books. It would be a sin, on this moor and in this weather. Well, here goes." And he opened the wooden gate of the farmyard.

Now, Mrs. Peters rarely left the farm, especially in the evenings; but on this particular evening she was anxious to attend a meeting held in a small Methodist chapel, about a mile off. So having filled her husband's pipe, and ascertained that Miss Evelyn wanted nothing, she set off, leaving the lodger in her own room, writing a letter, and her husband in his customary arm-chair by the kitchen fire.

Thomas was sleeping peacefully when Harry Anson arrived; so the artist, who was quite at home at Chagleigh, went quietly through the

kitchen, and ascending the little stairs, knocked at the door he had so often called his own.

"Come in," said a clear voice.

He obeyed, saying pleasantly, "I trust you will not think ——" and there stopped.

On the way to Chagleigh, Harry Anson had quite determined on the main features of the student's appearance. He had gifted Mrs. Peters' lodger with a tall, stooping figure, a sallow complexion, hollow eyes, and a rather rusty coat. In place of this typical student stood a young woman, of about middle height, well-formed, but not slender; her eyes were, as he saw in one moment's bewildered glance, neither dark nor hollow, but grey, with delicate brows almost square in outline. Hair of golden brown replaced the sickly black locks of the artist's mental picture, and the rusty black coat was a robe of soft dark blue, draping in elegant folds.

All this he saw in that one bewildered second. Then as a slight flush began to rise on the lady's cheek, he said confusedly:

"I beg your pardon most sincerely. I believe I have made some dreadful mistake."

So saying he retreated clumsily, he felt: and the lady bowed gravely without a word.

"I'd swear Mrs. Peters said a man," growled the artist, as he strode homeward at a furious pace. "But what *must* she think of me?" and the cloud of vexation which darkened his soul was becoming very dense when, suddenly, the comical aspect of the affair struck him, and he laughed long and heartily at the absurd mistake.

On returning from Chagleigh he found a note awaiting him. It was from the rector's wife, inviting him to dine and play tennis at the Parsonage on the following Monday. Mrs. Bayle was a very friendly old lady, and she had adopted Harry as one of her prime favourites on his first visit to the moor. He was usually glad to be invited to her house, but this evening he could not think of anything but the vision of the student as she had appeared in that one short pregnant moment. His fine taste lingered in admiration on the graceful form and the soft dark drapery; and his fancy was much excited by the fair face, as he had seen it, just beginning to colour into fuller life.

"It was like the quickening of the statue!" he said enthusiastically. "I wonder if I could get the pose? But the expression was everything." Late as it was he seized a pencil and tried to sketch an outline. But both face and form eluded his skill, and he threw up the attempt in disgust, longing for another sight of the beautiful image.

Sunday came, and the artist found himself weighing the probabilities of Miss Evelyn's attendance at Chagleigh church. Finally, he decided to go there as usual, and to sit, as he had always done, in Mrs. Bayle's great pew.

"If she's there I can't fail to see her," was his comforting reflection. With this pious motive he went to church and took his seat in the chancel pew. Mrs. Bayle was comfortably ensconced in one corner and her three grandchildren occupied three little stools at her feet; but these were the only persons he knew in the church. However, as they stood up to begin the service, he caught sight of a figure half hidden by the form of a burly farmer. His heart gave a glad bound, and he was everlastingly grateful to Farmer Roden as that worthy moved his position on the reading of the lessons, and permitted him to steal many furtive glances at the face that interested him so deeply.

"Who is the stranger lady?" he enquired of Mrs. Bayle as he was conducting her to her little pony-carriage after service.

"Miss Evelyn, you mean? She is a cousin of your friend the botanist, and you are going to meet her to-morrow afternoon. We dine at five, so that you may enjoy yourselves when it is cooler."

The little old lady was not aware what gratitude filled the heart of her favourite, but she was pleased with his bright smile and filial attentions, as he established her in the carriage and said good-bye.

IV.

THE drawing-room at Chagleigh Parsonage had never before seemed a very imposing room, in Harry Anson's eyes: but now, on entering, it seemed to him invested with the dignity of a presence chamber. For in the furthest window stood the woman who had interested him so much. He found that the grace of form, which was her greatest charm was natural, and not the accidental posture of a moment. Beauty of feature she could hardly be said to possess, but the wonderfully intelligent eyes, and broad, white forehead showed that her intellectual nature was of no mean order. Yet—and perhaps this was the secret of her grace—there was a certain individual modesty in her air and carriage.

Anson did not formulate these impressions, as they came to him in the first few moments of their intercourse. But he noticed, almost without intending to do so, every movement which might be characteristic. Dinner was soon announced, and, though he did not sit near her, the party was so small that he could still observe. The younger gentlemen left the table with the ladies, leaving the Rector over his glass of claret. Four of the party began to play almost immediately, and the rest—Anson, Miss Evelyn and Mrs Bayle—sat down to watch.

"I have been wishing for an opportunity to ask your forgiveness for my intrusion the other evening, Miss Evelyn," said the artist.

"And I have been wishing to thank you for your delicious trout," she answered, with a gleam of fun in her eyes. "I am afraid, though,

that I had no right to them. Mrs. Peters told me they were not intended for me."

"Ah, I see she has explained it all. I don't know how she came to make such a mistake. I suppose Mr. Evelyn simply said 'a student,' and left it to her ingenuity to guess that you were a lady."

"Yes, I think that must have been the cause. But I owe a great debt of gratitude to my cousin for finding out this lovely place."

"I was sorry not to see Mr. Evelyn when he was here," said Mr. Anson. "He used to try to infect me with a taste for botany when we rambled over the moor together."

So they talked on till the set was played through, and Miss Evelyn was compelled to join. Anson excused himself, more because he wished to watch her than because he was anxious to hear the result of Mrs. Bayle's last attempt at a Servants' Friendly Society. However, he listened to the good old lady with all due attention. He was much more sincere in his interest when she began to talk of her fair guest.

"She is a very talented girl, and a very good girl too," said Mrs. Bayle, warmly. "I don't know a more modest or a more unselfish creature."

"Is she studying for a profession?" asked Anson, curiously.

"Oh no, I think not—I hope not—I don't like the idea of women becoming doctors and lawyers, Mr. Anson. They will want to be clergymen next—and what a pretty state of things that would be!"

"Then I suppose Miss Evelyn studies for her own amusement?"

"Well, if you can call it so. But I believe she works very hard. I hope she takes plenty of exercise. I remember when I was a girl at school we walked three hours a day; morning and evening we went out, wet or dry."

"Miss Evelyn is an orphan, I believe?"

Seeing at last that her young friend was much interested in Miss Evelyn, Mrs. Bayle became exceedingly communicative, and everything that she told him interested him more and more deeply in the girl. She had been her father's constant companion since her mother died, leaving Florence only twelve years old. From that time she had kept house for him, nursed him when ill, written his letters and read to him in her so-called leisure moments. For five years she had given up all her time and thoughts to him, and though she was passionately fond of reading she had denied herself rigorously all relaxation of this kind, except, indeed, her reading to her father. Her father's death, three years before, had left her alone, and she had employed her time ever since in close and persevering study. Her only home was the house of an uncle who let her do just as she liked; "and she always likes to be alone," said Mrs. Bayle, thoughtfully. "It is strange and sad in so young a girl."

Miss Evelyn did not now look sad. At the moment she was standing at the edge of the court, and with a magnificent backhander

she had just won the last game for her side. The players sat down to rest, and Harry Anson brought Miss Evelyn a chair, saying :

"I hope you are not too tired to play again. I am going to ask you to play with me, if you will be so very kind."

"I shall be very glad," she answered brightly. "I am not at all tired."

"Do you mean *mid* or *with*, Mr. Anson?" queried Miss Annie Bayle, a schoolgirl. "For," she added wisely, "if you and Miss Evelyn are partners it is sure to be a love game—none of us can play against you two."

"That must be as Miss Evelyn wishes," returned Anson.

For several days Miss Evelyn went out regularly every morning. And no matter what direction she took she was sure to meet the artist either going or returning. Treating this at first as accidental, she exchanged a few pleasant words with him each time, but gradually her manner grew colder, and at length she passed him with a distant bow, and next day was not visible at all.

"Evidently I have been worrying her," said Anson to himself one evening, tired after three long, dull days by the trout-stream. "I can't stay here and not want to see her. But I can go away and leave her in peace."

With a very desolate feeling he made this characteristic resolve, but he meant to put it into practise, not knowing that fate had decreed otherwise.

V.

THE evening settled down early in a thick mist. Anson watched the dark masses of cloud rolling up and driving against the windows, wrapping the little farm-house in a dense covering. He was in a very restless mood, and the time hung heavily. He had some letters to write, but could not write them ; his rod had got out of order, but he did not care to mend it. He was leaving Miss Evelyn, and it was leaving the best part of his life behind.

"Of course she can't bear the sight of me," he reflected. "And I can never explain why I haunted her, for now she won't give me a chance. I can't make her love me by keeping about ; but I can't by keeping away, either. Anyhow, she shall enjoy the moors unmolested."

Mrs. Blake heard the news of her lodger's sudden departure with unfeigned dismay, notwithstanding his just settlement with her.

"But I might have known what to expect of a *hartist*," she told her good man in the kitchen. "There was Master Toller, from Exeter, couldn't abear the sight o' crame. An' the young man over to Mrs. Ladd's, in Teighmoor, never gets up out o' bed till two o'clock in the day. *Hartists* is never rightly of it, my dear."

The member of the eccentric profession who had given rise to

these remarks was, meanwhile, engaged in putting together his possessions. He had packed his colours and easels, when a loud knock was heard at the door, and Mrs. Peters was admitted.

"Where's Mr. Anson?" demanded the good woman, quite breathless.

"Gone to bed, a' rackon," answered Blake. "It's past ten o'clock. My dear, whatever be the matter?"

Anson had heard his name, and opened his door, saying: "Here I am, Mrs. Peters. What do you want with me?"

"Oh, Mr. Anson, where's Miss Evelyn? There's a mist out as black as night, and ——"

Before she could finish, Anson had seized his hat and was downstairs. "Miss Evelyn out in this mist!" he said. "Then not a moment must be lost. Mrs. Blake, give me a lantern. Which way did she go? Why didn't you come before? No one knows where she may be by this time."

Mrs. Peters began to weep. Mrs. Blake got a lantern and promised to wake her two sons and send them out to join in the quest, and Anson went out into the mist with Mrs. Peters, who was sobbing with fright and shaking with cold.

"Thomas was so bad, I didn't notice what a mist it was," she said piteously. "Miss Evelyn went out at four and said she would be back in a couple of hours. Maybe she's gone to the Rectory, but I never knew her to stay out a night yet."

Mrs. Peters' experienced eyes easily discerned the road to the Rectory, and she then left the young man to go on by himself. Her husband was really ill, and she dared not leave him.

The household had retired when Anson reached the Rectory, and he roused the old gardener with some difficulty. While he was trying to make old Trewin understand his errand, Mrs. Bayle appeared in dressing-gown and nightcap. She was much alarmed on hearing of the mist: Miss Evelyn had not been at the Rectory, and the old lady fully understood the danger to which her young friend was exposed. The Rector was away, and the only man on the place was Trewin, who, however, at once volunteered his aid in the search.

Anson was now growing desperate. He only waited to arrange that he should return to Mrs. Bayle before dawn, however the search might turn out, and he told the men who had followed him from his lodgings that they were to do likewise. He then plunged again into the gloom. He went, as he thought, in the Teighmoor direction, thinking this the most likely. He called Miss Evelyn's name now and then, and threw the rays of his lantern on every object he could discern along the road. At length he came to a place where the road dipped down and turned—he kept straight on and soon found that he was walking through the heather. He was as surely lost in the mist as if he had never trodden a moor in his life before, and his only chance lay in the hope of meeting one of the other seekers.

Hour after hour thus passed. When dawn came, struggling with

the mist that was now slowly rising, Anson found that he was many miles from the Rectory, the other side of Teighmoor, having skirted the town in some unaccountable way. Now for the first time he perceived that he was exhausted. He shivered as he dragged himself slowly along, and the great fear that had been with him through the night now seemed to have settled in the chill that wrapped him round. He went to the inn at Teighmoor and ordered a pony trap. The ostler knew him well and handed him the reins. But he could not hold them, and changed seats with the boy who was to bring back the chaise.

The road to Chagleigh Rectory had never seemed so long. At last they reached the gate, and Anson was descending, with difficulty, for his limbs were now stiff, when Mrs. Bayle rushed out, crying :

"Have you heard? She is found! She is quite safe!"

Anson could only gasp out: "Where was she? Is she hurt?"

"She is as well as ever," said Mrs. Bayle, in her motherly way. "But you are tired out—and how you shiver. You must go to bed directly and have some hot breakfast. Go and lie down on the drawing-room sofa till your room is ready."

He was only too glad to obey. When she brought him some breakfast a few minutes afterwards he looked more exhausted than ever, and could not be got to do more than taste the food. "You have a thorough chill upon you," she said decidedly. "Go to bed now and get warm if you can."

A thorough chill he had got. The long night spent in the cold mist provided him with a feverish cold which lasted for a fortnight. Mrs. Bayle watched him with motherly care, and as soon as he was able she moved him down to the drawing-room. By this time she had learned his feeling for Miss Evelyn, and the kind old lady determined to assist her favourite all that in her lay.

The explanation of the young lady's disappearance was simply this. She had walked out, not intending to go to Teighmoor, but meeting a small pony-chaise which belonged to a farmer near Chagleigh, she thought of driving to the town and back again, to see if some friends who were coming down to stay there had arrived. Jim Chubb, who was in charge of the pony-chaise, was glad enough to drive her for a small fee, and so she went to Teighmoor. But as the evening looked threatening her friends persuaded her to stay all night with them, and the boy was sent back to Chagleigh with a message for Mrs. Peters. But the boy had gone calmly to sleep, and the pony had made its way home in the mist, the boy not recollecting his message till next morning, when he went to Mrs. Peters with the news.

Mrs. Bayle often told Harry Anson of Miss Evelyn's kind enquiries. "She is very much distressed about you," said the good lady, noticing with a smile the good effect her words had upon her patient.

When the day came for his release from the sick-room, Mrs. Bayle said with some slyness :

"I have invited Miss Evelyn to come this afternoon, Harry. Do you think you are well enough to see her?"

It was like a dream, Harry thought. But she actually came and put out her hand with such a kindly look that his heart leaped up and his whole face was illumined. He had never looked so handsome.

"I can hardly say how much grieved I am to be the cause of your illness," she said, sitting down near him and regarding him with grave compassion.

What could he say? What did he say? I do not know. Something very foolish, doubtless. But Miss Evelyn did not think it foolish, for she talked on in her quiet tones, making the interesting invalid almost wild with contained happiness.

There were many more such afternoons in store for them. Harry did not get well quite so fast as might have been expected from a fine young fellow of twenty-three. But Miss Evelyn was always ready to read for him or sing to him or talk—anything to show how sorry she was that he had to suffer so much on her account. Her studies were rather interfered with, but it was wonderful how little she minded. And before the summer was over she had learned that there was a new and delightful world she had only dreamed of before—the Eden of perfect love.



LOVE'S LOYALTY.

From the French of VICTOR HUGO.

Why pause I in woodlands
Where song-birds rejoice,
When sweetest of song-birds
I hear in thy voice?

The stars may be flashing,
Or cloudy the skies,
I care not, my star-light
I find in thy eyes.

'Neath the kisses of April
Our gardens they shine,
But bloom fairer flowers in
That warm heart of thine.

All sunshine, all moonlight,
Where'er I may rove,
All spring-time, all music,
Are mine in thy love.

Alice King.

THE CHANNEL ISLANDS.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," "THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON," &c.

WITHOUT wishing to be alliterative, it is certain that we left Sark in silence and sorrow. And as a small vessel on a heavy sea is not conducive to a flow of spirits or conversation, the silence continued at least until we had reached the safe shelter of Guernsey harbour. For this we did reach in time and in a sense of rejoicing.



OLD GOVERNMENT HOUSE.

The passage, short though it be, is undoubtedly unpleasant in anything but calm weather; and the smooth waters of Guernsey harbour after the outside storm and tempest and beating about, are infinitely acceptable.

As for Guernsey itself—after the quiet of Sark, its desolation and isolation, its singular and indescribable charm, Guernsey was quite a large, thickly populated and mildly dissipated town. The houses seemed interminable as those of a metropolis; the streets felt, and looked, close and crowded; the quiet and repose of Sark made it appear a thousand miles distant when compared with this scene of bustle and small excitements. No wonder, then, that we went back in imagination to the little islands of Herm and Jethou, and felt that

we still had a day before us which should be marked with a white stone, provided only a propitious day should dawn.

And a day did dawn. One certain morning announced itself so bright and resplendent, that we felt our opportunity had come. About ten o'clock we found ourselves once more on the pier, a boat awaiting us at the foot of the steps. Away we went, scudding out of the harbour with a fair breeze and a dancing, glancing sea. The stormy skies of Sark had disappeared, for the moment at any rate; it was the perfection of invigorating weather. The boatmen were a couple of young fishermen, glad of a day's employment out of the season; a chance, as it were, of killing two birds with one stone; for, after a few hours' rest on their return, they would put out again for a night's fishing. The Guernsey fishermen are said to be a good specimen of their class, thrifty and well-conducted. They observe the Sunday also very strictly, and we were told that it would be difficult to persuade any one of them to take out his boat between Saturday night and Monday morning.

We first made for Jethou, the smaller of the two islands, the nearer, and the most quickly seen. They are separated only by a narrow strip of water, but it is sufficient to make them very distinct from each other. The boat flew through the sparkling sea, and before very long we found ourselves under the shadow of Jethou, which rose out of the water like a solitary green hill. But there is at least one house upon it, and in our ramble we came across a woman and a dog, who, for this morning, had the island in possession. Her "good man," the woman informed us, was away.

We mounted the rugged steps and a little way up the hill came upon the lonely house. The dog barked and out came the female custodian. The house was only a cottage, small and humble, but without rival to suggest invidious comparisons. The *châtelaine* of this feeble fortress informed us very civilly that we were free to roam the island, but she hoped we would respect her cabbages and spare her cow. We promised to observe both restrictions and began to wonder whether we had got back to the days of Rob Roy.

But the scenery had nothing of the wildness of Scotland, nor its romance; nor had the woman, though apparently Lady of the Isle, any of the picturesque appearance of a highland chieftainess. Free-spoken she was, with the straightforward simplicity of one unused to the world; but she was modest at the same time, and the commanding voice and terrible frown of Helen McGregor would have sat ill upon her. She indicated the path we were to follow, which indeed needed no indication, and retired within her clean and comfortable homestead. Her faithful prime minister at once held out a flag of truce by ceasing his noisy bark and following his liege, his tail comfortably between his legs. He trotted up to the fire that was burning in the hearth, though the day was warm, and threw himself before it with a dignified expression of countenance and a fine sense of having

done his duty. It was not often, now-a-days, that he was called upon to announce the arrival of strangers.

We went upwards. We too felt, somehow, in comfortable possession of the island. Woman and dog out of sight and hearing, we had it utterly to ourselves. The sense of freedom and retirement from the world was very delicious, perhaps because we knew it would be very fleeting. I do not believe that even stolen pleasures would be sweet if they were not of necessity shortlived. Before the conscience has had time to burden itself with remorse, the stolen pleasure has passed out of existence.

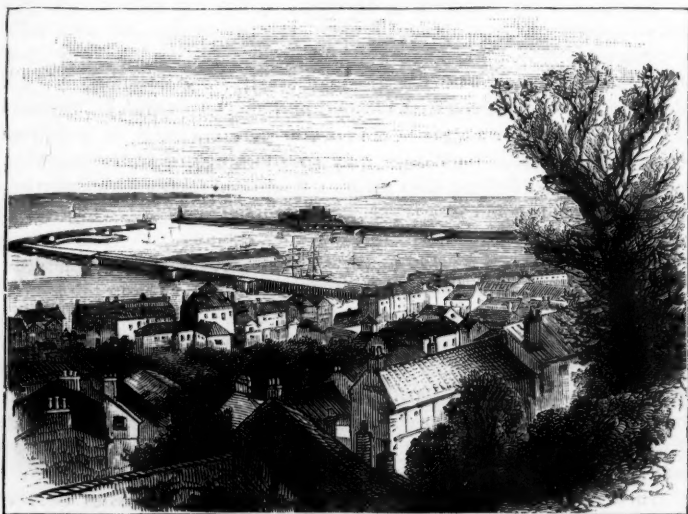
The pathway indicated by the guardian of Jethou wound round the island, and we ascended by degrees. There was something bright and singularly pleasant about Jethou. It was so small—about a mile in circumference—that standing at the summit you could take it all in at a glance. It might be likened to a lovely green emerald, and the silver setting was the sea that plashed and sparkled around. So near to you on all sides was this sea, that you were enclosed in a belt of sound; the sound, so pleasant and so soothing, of water breaking upon the shore, swishing over pebbles, rising and falling with a rhythm that enchants the ear like the measured cadence of a poem, or the dreamy extemporising of a master.

The island seemed to rest upon the sea. Almost, one wondered why it stood so firm and sure, and did not rock and sway in obedience to this great moving power that held it captive. A little way off was Herm, small enough also, yet large in comparison. Between them flowed the narrow channel of water, though always deep and wide enough to float a man-of-war. Further away, yet tantalisingly near, was our lovely and late lamented Sark. Our affection for it—I can at least speak of personal sentiments—was as vivid and constant as ever; we mourned her as a lover his lost mistress.

We were on the very summit of the hill, and the winds of heaven played around us. So also did the rabbits, almost at our feet. At sight of us, the tame little creatures could scarcely be persuaded to turn their white tails and disappear into their holes. It was the only token of life within range; that, and a few cows, and the boat that rocked upon the water at the foot of the steps where the men waited our return in patience. That return we should have liked to delay, though there was absolutely nothing to explore. Here was grazing land for the two or three cows that kept company with the rabbits and were more sociably inclined. They gazed at us with great, intelligent eyes, recognised friends with the instinct of animals, permitted us to approach and talk to them, and no doubt would have talked in return if endowed with the gift of speech. Beyond this pasture-land were the cabbages we had been entreated to respect nor felt inclined to transgress. Cabbages had no attraction for us. They were too large for button-holes, and being stalkless above ground, were not even tempting as curiosities. To our left was a small plantation of trees, utterly bare

of leaves. They looked old, decayed and dead, and stretched forth towards each other the most weird, naked and ghostly arms that ever were seen. Had we come upon them by moonlight we should certainly have taken them for an army of resuscitated spirits. Clothed in winding sheets, they would have terrified the stoutest heart and routed the bravest regiment.

I say that we could have lingered long here, and we did linger longer than was necessary. There are places that charm you from the first moment you set foot upon them, you hardly know why or wherefore. Faces and voices that take you captive at first sight and sound may be reduced to a definition: magnetic attraction; the inner



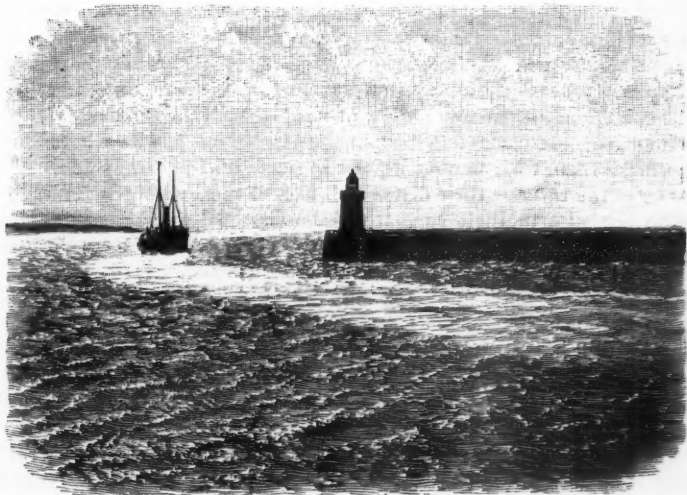
GUERNSEY HARBOUR FROM THE HEIGHTS.

consciousness or spirit inhabiting the same sphere; something outside and beyond ourselves: we are drawn or repelled whether we will or no. But it is less easy to account sometimes for the home feeling that creeps over one at the first moment of seeing certain places. It is as if we had been there in our dreams or in a previous state of existence. "Here I could live and die," are the words that rise unconsciously to the mind, and time and familiarity have no power to lessen that first impression.

It was thus with that small, insignificant little Jethou. There was nothing about it romantic or sublime, or in any way to raise enthusiasm. No grand rocks, no mediæval ruins, no luxuriant vegetation. Scarcely an inch of level ground. A few fields, a plantation of cabbages, many rabbits and a few cows. And yet something about it strangely attracted us. Here for a time we might pitch our

tent and be perfectly happy. A green hill rising out of the sea, which surrounded us in all its beauty. We seemed to have entered into intimate communion with it, with the winds of heaven, and all the bright blue canopy above.

But the boat was tossing upon the water, calm though it was, and the patience of our trusty men must not be overtaxed. So we went round by another way and thus completed the circuit of the island, and felt it might be said that we knew every inch of the ground. The feminine guardian of the cottage came out, saw us safely off her territory, testified to our honesty in the matter of cows and cabbages, and we set sail for Herm.



OUTWARD BOUND FROM GUERNSEY.

It was a very short sail indeed, and landing was an easier matter than it had been at Jethou. The invasion was more quickly accomplished. But from the first moment Herm did not attract us as Jethou had done; we had never seen it in our dreams. It seemed more commonplace, and from no other cause, I believe, than that our landing was greeted by a half dozen very ordinary urchins, who in looks, dress and manners might have been freshly imported from the East of London. Furthermore we saw, ahead of us, a short row of commonplace cottages, which looked neither lively, interesting, nor in the slightest degree romantic. And yet one of them at least was inhabited by a woman, who, to doubtless many other virtues, added that of kindliness. For H. was thirsty and had nothing wherewith to quench his desire; and this good woman set him her

best glass and went down and drew water from a deep, deep well, and staggered up the path with a baby in one hand and a full bucket in the other. H. drank of the sparkling liquid, was refreshed, and went on his way rejoicing.

It seemed a difficult thing, however, to make way in Herm. On nearly all the gates and at almost every turning was the announcement: "Private Road: No Admittance;" until we felt that here, at least, hospitality had ceased to reign. Cold, barren, comfortless, unkindly, such we felt Herm. After the few cottages alluded to, we walked and walked, and saw no habitation, and met no one. Utterly deserted and abandoned seemed the place. We boldly set aside the warnings and no one stayed us.

The island was very much larger than Jethou, but not pleasanter in proportion. It is private property. Some time ago, when the monasteries were abolished in France, and the monks, like Lord Bateman, had to sail east and west into foreign countries, the monks of the Grande Chartreuse thought they too would be put to flight. Amongst other places they bought the little island of Herm, intending to make there their famous liqueur in peace and profit. But, for the sake of the revenue their distillery brings to the French Government, who are wise in their generation, the Carthusians were allowed to remain in their retreat and have not up to the present time settled in Herm. Such is the story as 'twas told to us.

It was the only thing that by the power of association tinged the island with a slight atmosphere of romance. There rose up before us a vision of a splendid pass in Alpine mountains. The recollection of a day when this pass was white and cold and snow-laden. When the fir trees were covered with crystals that hid all the green and sparkled like jewels under the influence of a straw-coloured wintry sun in a pale-blue sky. We saw the horses struggling upward, slipping, and recovering themselves like the sure-footed beasts they were. The mountain stream had ceased to flow, for it was nothing but ice. Higher and higher, away from the world, out of humanity's reach, into the very heart of the mountains. Great snow piles, gigantic, endless, stretching heavenwards. The silence of death on all hands: appalling solitude that seemed to lock one's senses and chill one's life-blood. Inconceivable beauty and grandeur, yet awful by reason of its size, this endless expanse of white, this eternity of unbroken silence. And then, after a long, long struggle upwards, on the right, the low pile of the monastery, with its huge distillery, its countless cells, its little army of monks, who think themselves happy, we may well hope for them, and never cease, we may well pray for them, to count the world well lost.

It was a Good Friday Eve and we were going up to hear the midnight mass. After a light and by no means appetising supper, we were conducted to our cells. They were bare and comfortless, and freezingly cold. All night long the snow fell from the slanting roof

There is no Midnight Mass on Good Friday Eve

to the ground at regular intervals, with a mournful, monotonous thud—for the skies had overcast at sundown, and snow was coming thickly from the clouds. Then, a few moments before midnight, I was awakened by a cadaverous face in a cowl, who opened the door just wide enough to admit his deathlike head, and a ghostly whisper announced that mass was about to commence. Next he left me in utter darkness and glided away like a phantom through the interminable corridors of this living tomb.

It was the monks of this order who had bought Herm, and the fact cast some slight atmosphere of romance upon the little island. It was well named, too, for Herm is said to be a corruption of the word Hermit. The island was severe enough, even for a strict order of monks; but what a change for them from the bosom of those far-off impenetrable mountains; those miles and miles of fir forests; trees so sad and sombre, with their vast solitudes never broken by any sound but the melancholy sighing of the wind amongst the branches. Yet a somewhat similar sound they would have had here to recall their lost scenes, in the surging of the sea upon the shore. And the ever-restless sea, too, is just as suggestive of might and grandeur and eternity as those great unchangeable mountains, and is, after all, less cold and unfriendly.

We threw ourselves on the warm white sand and despatched the midday meal we had taken care to bring with us, for the island has neither inn nor any other house of entertainment. It gives you no welcome of any kind. Next we noticed the only civil announcement as yet seen, in the words: "This way to the shell-beach." Taking the hint, and passing over a stretch of desolate heather-land, we soon found ourselves on the opposite side of the island.

This shell-beach is the attraction of Herm. It seems to be the only one in all the islands, and people flock over to Herm during the season for the purpose of making a collection. This is easily done. A long stretch of beach was white with shells. There were long lines of shells, and piles and piles of shells, and little mountains of shells. We could not walk without treading upon shells, and we could not dig but we came to shells. One knew not where to begin. Thousands of them were very pretty, very few of them were rare. Perhaps the prizes had been secured by the multitudes during all the past summer months. The shore was flat, and the tide was flowing gently and calmly, possibly bringing up fresh treasures for others to gather. We certainly should not. Nevertheless we made a considerable selection by dint of wandering up and down in that searching, expectant manner that is more tiring than the treadmill (not that I can speak of the latter from experience); and a couple of hours passed as a moment.

Then we left the shell-beach and the inflowing tide, and, regardless of warnings, plunged across the island. On the higher part was a curious building that certainly must be explored. It proved as desolate and deserted as any other portion of Herm. A large, straggling

pile, with quadrangles and detached rows, and a huge boiler in one corner, and no sign of life anywhere. Yet people evidently lived there, for a few pigs of enormous size came up on a visit of inspection; but we, having an antipathy to pigs, drove them back, and they decamped with the graceful gallop of their kind, grunting and squealing, to report an invasion and save the island. The building seemed the very place for a distillery, and the little houses might easily have been turned into cells for the monks. It is quite possible that they may yet come and take possession, and people the island, and make it less dreary and desolate than it seemed to-day. The Jesuits have settled in Jersey, why not the Carthusians in Herm?

The afternoon was waning when we felt it necessary to bid it farewell. We had seen all there was to be seen. It was not very much. A portion of the island is farmed; there were ploughed fields and potato fields, and we actually came upon the startling apparition of a man at work in one of them, who stopped in his labour, and stared at us as if we had been aborigines, or a first instalment of the monks come to take possession of their own. This was almost at the end of the tour of inspection. In a few minutes we had rounded a corner, and there, far down, beyond the steps, was the boat, whilst the men, all safe and sound, might have sat for models of Resignation. Down we went, and at the steps found a couple of women and a dozen children. One of them was the ministering spirit who at midday had supplied H. with fresh water from the well.

"I am sorry, sirs," she said, as we approached, "that I did not think of offering to make you some tea before leaving the island. You would have been glad of a cup, it may be."

We should, undoubtedly. We had even thought of proposing to return for it at four o'clock. But the good woman's husband had come in to his dinner whilst H. was deep in his refreshing draught, and was so surly, and so evidently looked upon us as intruders, that we felt any further advances on our part would be received with a deeper draught of cold water than the above referred to. We thanked the woman for her friendly intentions; it was too late now to do anything else; and said we would remember them when we next visited the island.

Then we departed, and the women and children watched us away. There was a melancholy in their attitude which we felt had a corresponding note in their history. How could it be otherwise on this dreary, almost uninhabited island? Their lives could know no change from day to day; few events beyond the little fractious, worrying cares that always follow in the wake of a troupe of worrying children. They were evidently poor, too. Less than a year ago they were inhabiting one of the largest towns in England; and here, if they felt at all about it, they must have seemed as cut off from the world as the monks in their monastery, in the far-off mountains of France. Seated on the top of that long flight of grey, rugged steps,

in the shine and shadow of the declining sun, they looked companions in sorrow, and were to us a last melancholy impression of Herm.

The day had not disappointed our hopes. There is something infinitely pleasant about these deserted islands, where you find so little record of mankind. Even Herm became a recollection one liked to dwell upon. We got back to Guernsey in the glory of an autumn evening. The declining sun cast a flush upon town and sea. The sky was resplendent with fleecy, gold-tipped clouds. Guernsey harbour looked quite picturesque and romantic. Guernsey, too, had had an exciting day. Whilst we, pursuing the even tenour of our way, had trod the quiet paths and shores of Herm and Jethou, the Governor had held a reception at Old Government House Hotel, to which all the town had been bidden, and we returned to find our comfortable quarters very much like the banquet-room in Moore's exquisite melody and most pathetic poem—its lights all fled, its garlands dead. But, ere long, order was reduced out of chaos, and nothing remained to testify of what had been but a sweet perfume of flowers, which hung about the rooms and corridors as the scent of distilled roses will hang round its shattered vase.



A BIRTHDAY.

1884.

Your birthday, dear—a year ago

The world with Maytide joy was glad ;

I heard you whisper, as you stood

In the green shadow of the wood,

“Can any heart to-day be sad ?”

A year ago I brought you flowers,

Long sprays of hawthorn, pink and white ;

But now those flowers are dry and dead,

And you may pass with noiseless tread

O'er fields with fairer blossoms bright.

A year ago I wished you joy,

That all things good the year might bring ;

But, ere the time rolled round again,

Came first the Angel Herald Pain,

And then, a summons from the King.

A year ago ! A year ago

I clasped your hands and kissed your brow ;

Now you have journeyed far away ;

Beyond our earthly night and day—

The angels keep your birthday now.

FLORENCE TYLEE.

A FOG ROMANCE.

IT was mid-morning in fair London town. It might have been night-fall in the City of the Clouds for all outward evidence to the contrary. Masses of dingy vapour rolled up against the window-panes, stirred now and then by a sooty little breeze, from nowhere in particular, that dispersed them not, only made a little black eddy and departed.

Indoors it felt at once hot, clammy, choking and smutty. The room was airy and spacious; one of the best private sitting-rooms Langham had to offer; yet Imogen Ray had just declared, "It felt like a chimney on fire being put out with wet blankets." She was leaning against the window-frame as she spoke, gazing into the grimy sea of vapour, half-interestedly, half-abstractedly.

She was very beautiful, even by that hideous light; with the singular beauty only found on the farther shores of the Atlantic; delicate, fragile and marvellously brilliant. ("The beauty of snowpeaks at sunrise; of an opal, with its heart of fire under its veil of snow," to quote the unsuccessful beginning of a poetical adorer, who gave up after a few more attempts to reduce the Ineffable to a pen and ink summary.) She looked like a poem, a melody, an artist's dream; and was a matter-of-fact, alert, business-like young damsel, practical and self reliant as became a citizen of "Airth's greatest nation."

Her companion was leisurely finishing his breakfast. He might have been a dignitary of the Church by his dress. His stalwart build, and a general suggestion of open air life that pervaded him, seemed to indicate a sailor or a colonist, but the noble, intellectual head, with its silken mane of snowy hair, the massive features with their curious expression of indolent shrewdness could belong to none but the original of the face that smirked in the *Graphic* and scowled in the *Illustrated* on the side-table, and had been for the past week decorating the photographers' windows in very mixed company; the face of the temporary lion of London literary society, the great Trans-Atlantic poet, philosopher and critic, Everard Holt, whom the literary world aforesaid had for the past week been delighting to honour.

"You have your wish at last, Imogen," he said; "this is 'quite a London particular,' according to Guppy."

"Yes. I felt we should lose something if we left without a fog—but I've got rather a thicker one than I expected here."

She didn't talk Yankee, only paid more respect to her vowel-sounds and enunciated more incisively than is the wont of us indolent Britishers and her voice had the music of silver on silver. Speaking,

she glanced out into the dinginess and in at a square envelope which she held daintily and respectfully. It was fastened by a big red seal bearing a coat of arms and a coronet, at which she glanced with admiration unworthy her race.

"This is a gloomy ending to our holiday, dear," and Everard looked towards her anxiously. *Towards* her, not *at* her, thereby betraying what many of his casual acquaintances never perceived, that he was blind—totally, hopelessly blind—from some accident late in his life at the very zenith of his popularity and usefulness.

He had accepted the calamity characteristically, tried patiently and fairly every possible means of recovery; then, these failing, with the same zest with which he had been wont to turn to some fresh branch of study, he had applied himself to the mastery of every art and device by which the lost sense might be supplied. He had a marvellous memory and a curiously sensitive nervous organisation—and he had Imogen, his loving, devoted adopted child.

"Nothing can spoil our holiday, or our home-coming," she added quickly. "From first to last all has been pleasantness."

"And you don't regret the old country in your heart of hearts?"

"I am very, very glad to have been here and seen England and English people for myself; but my heart of hearts is and always will be American. Oh, it's good to think that in a fortnight more we shall be under the Chislehurst elms again!"

Everard and Imogen had spent a year wandering happily about Europe together, sight-seeing, making friends, collecting materials for a new work and a course of lectures, and finding themselves welcome and honoured everywhere by Everard's brethren of the great craft of book-making. The morning paper that lay collapsed on the floor contained a long account of a grand banquet in his honour given by a distinguished circle of his admirers the night before, and also a paragraph announcing his departure next day from Liverpool for New York.

"What time do we leave this?" Everard asked presently.

"Not till five," Imogen replied rather dismally, "and I've packed my last scrap and read you every line worth reading in all the papers, and there's nothing left to do but sit and long for some fresh air after all last night's gas and eloquence till the fog rises. Ugh! how it seems to close one in and strangle one."

"Fogs after all have their limits," said Everard. "It *is* possible, I believe, to go right through and find light and free air beyond. Should you like to try? *I'm* ready."

"So am I, but stop—let me put up your things first and start with a clear conscience."

"You are too late for once, oh most scrupulous of guardian angels. I have packed. Did it myself in a fit of independence and consulted the chambermaid on the result. She says I have left nothing out and made a beautiful job of it."

"Uncle, are you tired of me?" with a pained ring of reproach in her voice.

"Imogen, are you jealous of your authority over me, and afraid of my ascertaining the limits of my powers? There is better work in the world for you, my dear, than playing dog-in-a-string to a blind old man; and when it comes, I want you to feel that though I prize your love and service beyond all else on earth, I can live without you, my darling." He spoke slowly, as if watching to detect some sign of her mood. "Now get ready, in ten minutes, if you can," he ended briskly, starting up and making for the door.

The waiter had drawn forward a side-table to hold some breakfast accessories, and Everard, ignorant of the change, came heavily against it. He laughed, ascertained with rapid touch that nothing was upset or injured, and left the room lightly. Imogen, knowing his ways, did not attempt to interfere or assist, but stood aside watching him with a loving, wistful look in her shining eyes.

"Do without me one of these days! He *can't*, with all his pretence, and he shall never be asked; never, never! My darling uncle, the best, noblest, wisest of men. It is only too much honour for a stupid little thing like me to be permitted to give him my life's best love—and he has it."

She winked away a bright little tear from her long lashes—laughed a little, and drew out of the big envelope a decidedly masculine-looking epistle, in bold black characters, with a big scrawly signature on the last page, "Gerald Adare."

"It looks plain enough and easy enough to answer," mused she, "and it's neither one nor the other. He says"—running hastily over the contents—"he relies on me to tell him whether he may really avail himself of my uncle's invitation to Chislehurst. If so, he thinks of starting at once for the States, by the same steamer as ourselves, if possible. He is at Liverpool awaiting my reply, &c., &c. Now what *does* it mean, or what will he understand by my answer. He used to talk of wishing to see America, and perhaps of settling down there, though uncle only laughed at the notion; and now it seems as if he were in earnest.

"If I write him a cool little note telling him—what is strictly true—that the doctors recommend perfect rest and quiet to uncle for some time to come; if I gently put him off for the present, why, it will be for good and all. I feel it. Some other fancy will come between us and there will be the end of our friendship. I *hate* to think it! I don't mind saying so—when nobody can hear me."

"Shall I say 'Come'? He'll come fast enough. He'll see our beautiful home and what Americans are at their best; not the rubbish that disgraces our nation all over Europe. He'll understand then what my dear uncle is—a prophet that *has* honour in his own country; and—if he comes, he'll never go away again. Why should he? He says he is a cosmopolitan, with *no* local prejudices (unless he has

one in favour of the place where *we* happen to be found); he *hates* his Irish estates and his title, and would gladly hear the last of both one and the other. *Shall* I say 'Come'?—and yet ——”

Here Everard's footstep was audible, and hastily concealing the letter, Imogen hurried on her hat and Newmarket and went to meet him.

“Which way?” he asked, as they issued from the portico on to the greasy pavement.

“This way looks the clearest. If you keep straight on and then turn right round and come back we *can't* be lost,” argued Imogen in her ignorance, and they started.

Unfortunately, they came to a street which did *not* go straight on. “Well, we can take this left turning and keep straight along here. It certainly grows lighter at the end.” They groped on cautiously, guided by the area railings. Then came a noisy crossing of some main thoroughfare. Imogen looked at Everard doubtfully and turned to the left again rather than attempt to pilot him over.

It was growing brighter, fading from dim to pale copper colour; there *must* be sun somewhere, and in the distance was a glimpse of trees, that Imogen decided must be “one of the parks,” but which turned out to be an unknown square. Then a policeman, against whom they ran blindly, helped Everard across a street and put them in the direct road home—which proved to be by such disreputable back-streets that Imogen got alarmed and made for the first open space.

Then the fog lifted, showing a large clear street with something like a cab-stand at the far end, and along it they sped merrily.

“Why we've got home without knowing it; there's Portland Place down that turning,” cried Imogen, delighted.

“It doesn't *seem* like our part of the world,” said Everard, who had the ears of a trapper; “but places sound different in this atmosphere.”

“We shall come to a name presently.” Down swooped the fog again before the words left Imogen's lips, and when they got to a name it was one they had never heard of. The situation was becoming monotonous. It had been amusing enough at first, when the brighter atmosphere seemed to lie at the end of every street they turned into, while Everard made guesses at places and people, like a schoolboy playing blind-man's-buff, and laughed at his guide's helplessness. Now he was silent and Imogen anxious. It was growing thicker and thicker, till even her way-mark, the area railings, failed her if she lost hold of them, and had to be recovered by groping. She felt Everard drag on her arm as she led him, and his face, as well as she could make it out, looked drawn and overspread with a hue she had learnt to mistrust.

“What are we to do?” she asked, trying to laugh. “I can't turn back in search of that cab-stand. I forgot how many turnings we have passed, and policemen seem to have vanished from the face of the earth.”

One o'clock boomed from an invisible church steeple.

"It's quite a new part of the town," she went on; "large houses and no shops. We must have come far out west without knowing it, and I never thought of bringing the wraps."

She stood perplexed, leaning against the railings of a large house looming aloft through the murk.

"I'll tell you what I can do! I'll ring and ask our way. Why didn't I think of that sooner?" And up the steps she led him and gave a vigorous peel at the bell. A footman answered it promptly.

"We are lost in the fog," said Imogen; "can you direct us to the Langham Hotel?"

The man's face grew doubtful. "I don't know that I can, miss. It's a good way from here—but I'll enquire."

"No; if it's far off tell me where I can get a cab."

"Well, if you go straight on, turn to the right, and take the third street on your right again, you may find one on the stand—or there's Toke's livery stables close by."

"That's better." But a glance at Everard made her reflect. "Is there anyone in the house who can go for me and let us wait here?" Thomas stared at the audacious proposal. "Or can some one show me the way and let this gentleman rest here?"

Thomas had heard of umbrella snatchers and overcoat thieves, and looked as if it were more than his place was worth to fall into that arrangement either. However, Thomas was young and impressionable, and Imogen's face and voice worked on his tender heart. "I'll enquire, miss," he conceded, and, crafty in his way, went with his story, not to the respectable old butler just then crossing the hall, but sharp to the right, through morning-room and library, to his young mistress's own sitting-room.

He was back in two minutes with "Miss Langton's compliments, and will you and the gentleman please step in."

They gladly followed him as he retraced his way through the softly-carpeted, richly-furnished rooms to the very heart and centre of the house's comfort and luxury. A long, low room lighted by a silver lamp at the far end, near which on a couch lay a girlish figure.

"I cannot rise to receive you," she spoke in a sharp, though musical voice, "please excuse me and come and sit down."

Imogen felt as she approached the keen exhaustive gaze of a pair of the brightest, darkest eyes she had ever met; eyes disproportionately large for a tiny, eager white face. She found Everard a seat, and then said:

"We are in great difficulties, and all through my foolhardiness. Will you help us?"

"With pleasure. I hear you want a guide and a messenger, you shall have one directly. Was it not odd? I was just lying speculating on what I should do if I were out alone in the fog when your ring came."

The bright eyes had left Imogen and wandered off to Everard, who now moved within the circle of the lamplight. "I—excuse me," she faltered, suddenly excited, "but may I not know your name?"

"Everard Holt."

"I *knew* it," she said triumphantly, producing a large photograph from an envelope. "My uncle brought me home this last night. He was at Willis's Rooms."

"Was he Colonel Pyers-Lloyd, who returned thanks for the Army?"

"Now how *could* you possibly tell that? We are not at all alike."

"I cannot judge of your faces, but your voices are the same."

She clapped her hands in a gleeful, childish fashion. "Delightful! You recognised the Welsh accent. How pleased he will be! Don't you know he was there as representative of Cymric poetry, and has more titles than you would care to hear as a bard?"

"I know his translations well, and have read his monograph on Cymric versification."

"You *must* stay and see him. He will be home to luncheon and will never forgive me if I let you go. You *will* stay. I will order the carriage as soon after as you please."

Everard waited for Imogen to reply, which she did with quite unreasonable hesitation. Miss Langton was in hospitable earnest; her uncle acquiescent, it would be utterly and superfluously ungracious to decline; but she could not accept with her wonted graceful frankness, though she tried to be cordial. She was transferred to the charge of a sedate maid, who assisted her to remove her wraps and the traces of fog and soot through which she had been struggling, and freshly prinked and smiling she returned to her hostess.

"I wonder what ails me?" she asked herself, as from the room door she beheld her uncle and Miss Langton in full tide of talk. "Why does the air of this place thrill me into a fever of self-consciousness? I could fancy Miss Langton the dark lady that all fortune-tellers are agreed shall cross my path! Absurd."

The dark bright eyes, charged with their curious magnetic attraction, rested on her as she advanced, and she blushed like an embarrassed schoolgirl. The servants entered directly after, with preparations for luncheon, which was laid on a table within reach of Miss Langton's couch. Imogen sat silently observant. Her training in art had been thorough enough to teach her the value of her surroundings. Each detail of the room seemed to have been specially chosen by some one of peculiar taste with money to gratify it. The flickering fire of scented wood on the wide hearth glimmered over carved wood, wrought brass, rare china, curiously mingled tints of colour, a screen of exotics masking the street's ugliness, and the gilt and leather of sumptuous bindings. Books were everywhere, and piles of papers, stands of engravings and photographs, all clustered round the central

figure of the girlish mistress of the house, at whom Imogen had hardly ventured to glance at first. She was young; much younger at the second glance; at the third, handsome. The original type of the face, fine and noble, worn and shrunken by long continued pain or care that had drawn fretted lines between the eyebrows and curved the lips distressfully. A cloud of dusky hair was swept back and upwards and secured by two golden pins. Her dress was a loose gown of dark crimson velvet, edged with grey fur, from the sleeves of which her tiny waxen hands peeped out, weighted by one massive ring.

She presided gracefully at the table, on which the china and glass were art studies, and each piece of plate worthy a separate line in a collector's catalogue. Colonel Pyers-Lloyd did not appear, and nobody missed him. Everard, his momentary faintness passed away, was bright and interested. He felt the influence of the surrounding atmosphere (not to speak of the luncheon being the perfection of good cheer), touched the beautiful things about him delicately and appreciatively, listening to Miss Langton's few words of clear description and—luncheon over—fell into one of his happiest moods of talk, that an admiring biographer would have given all his spare cash to overhear. Imogen was courteously included in the conversation, but soon sank into silent thought. She had never seen her uncle so completely at his best in strange company, frank and pleasant as he always was, Miss Langton though saying little, seemed to draw him on by some mysterious sympathy, from general topics to personal experiences, till Imogen listened wonderingly to his stories of long-past struggles, cherished aspirations, thoughts, fancies, successes, failures; sacred things, that she had not dared to touch, had only gazed on from afar with reverence, brought forth for the handling of this curious stranger.

"She is playing upon him—the witch! I hate her. How can she do it, though?" and she resumed her study, half in admiration, half in repugnance. "She could bewitch me too, if she thought it worth while," she admitted later on, reluctantly.

The afternoon slid on imperceptibly, and Everard, worn out by fatigue and unusual excitement, laid his head back in his large arm-chair, and slept. Miss Langton smiled—a pretty, kind smile it was—and gently lowered her lamp, then pointed to a low chair by her couch, invitingly. Imogen slipped into it, unwilling, but drawn by the spell of the dark, speaking eyes. She held hers averted in silence for a moment, and then—a soft little hand stole round her neck, and a kiss from two burning lips dropped on her forehead. "You are so beautiful, so loving and true; he has told me all about you, and now I am going to make you as wretched as I am myself." And Imogen felt the dash of hot tears on her cheek.

Imogen sat trembling, excited, waiting for the next words, and when they came not, timidly lifted her eyes. Miss Langton was

lying back on her couch, her hands clasped hard over her breast, her lips moving silently.

"Do you love him?" she asked sharply, with a glance at Everard's noble placid face.

"Dearly, dearly. He has been more than father to me all my life. I am not his niece. I am nothing to him but a friendless, nameless, little outcast waif, that he picked up from amongst the rest of the street rubbish; took me from a horror of blows and starvation, that is all my recollection of babyhood, took me up to a heaven of love and brightness.—God bless him!" cried Imogen, through her tears, dropping her head on her knees, and crying quietly from her full heart's thankfulness.

"And you are ready to leave him for so poor a thing as Gerald Adare?"

Imogen started at the sting of these words, looking proudly up, with eyes aflame under their wet lashes.

Miss Langton drew forward a small stand on which stood a miniature easel, veiled by a black drapery. Her hand trembled as she touched its folds, but she drew them aside hastily, as if fearing to trust herself. A large photograph had been concealed there, a portrait of a tall, handsome young man, leaning against a tree, holding a great Irish deerhound in a leash. It was a beautiful picture, as well as an excellent likeness, giving fairly well an impression of the languid grace of the original, with his low, wide forehead, sleepy, "faithless Irish eyes," and mouth almost too sweet for a man.

"Yes, he *is* a poor thing—but mine own—mine own," she murmured, and turned again to Imogen. "You know it?"

"That is Mr. Adare—Lord Adare, I mean. I forget how we made the mistake at first, but he would never let us correct it," she replied, hurriedly, with an attempt at indifference.

"Where did you meet him?"

"At a table d'hôte at Prague, where he helped us through some contretemps. I had left Everard for a short time, and he was in difficulties all round when I got back. Then we met at Vienna, and travelled together home. He was so good in helping my uncle to see everything, or rather me to see everything for uncle."

"I understand," very drily. "When did you see him last?"

"In Paris, last month." And Imogen felt the letter rustle guiltily in her pocket.

"And now he is going to the States?"

"I—don't know," faltered Imogen.

"He will go if you ask him, and then——"

"I am not the ruler of his actions," cried the poor harassed beauty, fairly roused. "He may come if he likes, and I dare say he will. I hope so. I don't call him a poor thing, if *you* do."

Miss Langton lay silent, her eyes closed, her hands clasped nervously across her breast. When she spoke it was calmly and sadly.

"You must let me tell you all I can about my cousin Gerald. You ought to know it, in any case. He was my father's ward, but he lived with his mother, his other guardian, for six months out of every year. She was a fool—" Miss Langton spoke viciously—"a soft, sentimental creature, with no moral fibre, who kept her boy at her apron-string singing hymns and playing gentle games till he grew to look on our home, with my rough-and-ready brothers' society, as a species of annual purgatory. They couldn't make allowance for him. He shuddered at them. I lived in a state of combat with both parties, championing him against them, and quarrelling with him for his priggishness. He was a loveable, pretty little man, and we were faithful allies on the whole. I *drove* him to persist in going to Eton, when Lady Adare wished to complete his education under some pet curate of her own; and he did fairly well, against all our expectations. Then came Oxford, with less credit. I fumed and raged at the reports that reached us, and at last worried my father into taking me to see him at college and speak my mind, as of yore. He listened to my exhortations—with a difference.

" 'Maudie,' he said, when I had done, 'will you take me for good and all, and make something of me?'

"Such a happy time followed. Seven long years ago, my dear. Seven long years!"

She stopped and sighed. Imogen held a Japanese fan between her face and the light, and sat motionless and silent. Only Everard's quiet breathing and the light fall of the feathery wood ash broke the pause.

"I wonder what you are thinking of," said Miss Langton, with a queer little smile. "You must hear me out now.

"We were to have been married when he left Oxford—with a respectable degree—but then came my father's illness and death. Gerald was not then of age, and endless difficulties had to be settled first about his property. You know he is a large landowner in the west of Ireland. That Irish estate was the great trouble of my father's life. Lady Adare positively refused to live there or to join in establishing a trustworthy agent there. Lord Adare's will had left everything in her power till Gerald should come of age. We went to Castle Adare for one summer, and came back saddened to the heart by what we found there. Grinding poverty, oppression, degrading pauperism—it drove my father wild to feel his hands were tied. He could do nothing. Lady Adare was stolidly indifferent. My only comfort was in Gerald's promises: 'We will work together there, Maudie. Only wait till I have the power and you to teach me how to use it.'

"Castle Adare is a black spot on the face of the country yet.

"We should have married on his coming of age, but Lady Adare fell ill—I don't say she did it on purpose, but it happened opportunely, and Gerald was sent for. She didn't die, only kept him

wandering about the Continent with her for three years; losing his time, his money, and all that makes a man's life worth living—his sense of duty to his country and his fellow creatures. She died, and he was delivered from the deadliest of small tyrannies—that of a narrow nature over a generous spirit. Then he came back to me.

"He had written from Germany begging that nothing now might delay our marriage—that it might take place as soon after his return as possible—he had grown superstitious, and so, indeed, had I, as to the result of a third postponement. So all was in readiness; dresses, breakfast, settlements, everything in readiness for his return two days before the wedding. He would hardly let me out of his sight when he came at last. I see his face now as he stood at the foot of the staircase the night before, looking up after me: 'Good night,' he called, and something else which I did not hear; I turned to listen, slipped somehow, and then I remember a long, long space of time, when I felt myself falling and heard the ringing crash on the marble floor of the lamp I carried before the shock came and all was blank blackness. They said it was an injury to the brain; then some internal displacement; it was spine, nerves; I don't know what. I only knew in the short flashes of consciousness between long intervals of speechless torture, that they gave me very little longer to live. Never mind the story of that black time. I don't want to trade on your sympathies."

Imogen stole one tiny hand into Miss Langton's, but kept silence.

"Gerald behaved *perfectly*. Ah! my dear, think what it must have been to both of us when the terrible discovery was made that I was going to *live*. If I had died, he had it in him to be faithful to my memory, and I, dead, might pray that on earth my love might live again for him in the heart of some woman, stronger or nobler than I; but could I hold him bound to me, living? I forced his freedom on him and sent him from me. You would have done the same had you been the crushed, maimed, half-dead creature I was then. I bid him never to return unless I sent for him, and he has obeyed me.

"Do you know Dr. Julius Cope? He is a countryman of yours. Charlatan or none, his cures have been marvellous, and I resolved to try him. In six months I could use my arms, in three more raise myself; now I can walk a few steps, and in a year he says I shall be as well and strong as ever I was in my life."

"Does he know—Lord Adare?"

"No. The new hope was too slender and precious to share even with him. I have written now and then, telling him nothing till I could tell him all. Last week I wrote, in dread, and yet hopelessness of what his answer would be, and—the letter is here still," and she pointed to the pillow of her couch.

"Oh, why, *why* did you not send it?" cried Imogen, a ring of pain in her voice.

Charlatan

"Because Dr. Cope has just returned from Paris. He met you there—and Gerald, and told me what he had heard. See, I had given him up, as I had only pretended to do before. I had crushed out my last little flickering hope that life was not all over for me, when you came to me. Surely, I said, providence gives me one chance more, if I can stoop to beg my lover back from her. Give him to me, Imogen; you are young—beautiful—happy in your home. There are better men in the world than Gerald. What is a lover more or less to you? But in taking him you take away my all."

So she pleaded with an impetuous rush of words that checked all reply from Imogen. The two girls had clasped hands and were silent for an instant, Maud from exhaustion, Imogen seeking for words, a melancholy little smile flitting across her pretty lips.

"How do I know that he is my lover? He has never told me so, and shall never be tempted to do so. I think I could have *made* him love me, perhaps; and I should have liked to try—but Maud, I never could have loved him as you do. Send your letter, dear, and let me go home to write mine. Here, take and read this; it is all that has ever passed between us," and she tossed the crimson-sealed envelope into Maud's lap.

Everard stirred, yawned, sat up suddenly. "Imogen! Miss Langton! What *have* I been doing?"

"No harm, dear uncle, the carriage has only just come to the door, and Miss Langton and I have been very happy."

"Why it is clear," cried Everard, rising and drawing a full breath.

"And starlight," said Imogen. "You said there were limits to every fog, and light and freedom on the other side of it. Good-bye, Maudie."

"God bless you, Imogen."



DAME URSULA'S TREASURE.

IF unkept walks, trailing, neglected creepers, and a heavy overgrowth of ivy are the essentials of the picturesque, Clovis Court presented them all. There were box trees that had formerly represented pyramids, garden seats, and lively crowing cocks—but the hands that pruned them were gone, and the spectator now only saw ragged and untidy foliage. The bowling-green, once like velvet, had added nettles and thistles to its own rank crop. Could one of the beauties who a century ago bowed there have seen it, she would have picked up her dainty skirts and fled.

A beauty of a century later stands amongst the desolation. What a picture is the auburn-haired maiden leaning against an old, weather-beaten sun-dial! Simply clad in a dark grey dress, a bunch of pale yellow chrysanthemums carelessly fixed near the throat, her white little hands clasped before her, Ursula Baring looked sadly over the waste.

True loveliness seldom rests long unseen, and a large rift in the brick wall displayed our heroine to the gaze of a young man who was riding slowly past. It was but a minute's work to dismount, secure the bridle to a convenient tree, and scale the broken wall. With heightened colour and quick steps, which caused the fair maiden to turn with a startled blush, Guy Norman reached the sun-dial.

"Mr. Norman! why are you here?"

"Because *you* are here," replied the young man coolly, and at the same time firmly securing one of the little white hands.

"But," demurred Ursula, feebly trying to re-possession herself of her hand, "we are forbidden to meet. Your uncle——"

"Is an old reptile! Ursie, be sensible! They keep us apart, heaven knows, cleverly enough! let us be happy, my darling, while we have the chance."

The girl's face paled—she trembled and looked down. "Guy, I love you—oh! indeed, I love you! but my mother *trusts* me. She said your uncle had told her he could not hear of anything between us; and we are very proud, Guy!"

The young man dropped her hand hastily.

"You don't love as I do, or uncles and mothers would be nothing to you," he said haughtily.

Ursula looked up with her lovely, tremulous gaze of love.

"Uncles, perhaps not! but *mothers*, Guy! What are girls good for who do not love and honour mothers like mine?"

A handsome, winning face stooped to her own, and begged forgiveness. They had been plighted lovers a week ago, and the break which prudent counsels had made was so recent, I will beg you to

forgive my Ursula who yielded her lovely lips to kiss those waiting for them. It was brief bliss, though, for she heard a voice calling her.

"Good-bye, my darling," murmured the lover, "we will surmount our troubles yet."

"Oh, for Dame Ursula's treasure!" sighed the modern Ursula, as, half laughing, she sped away to the cottage across the road.

For to live in Clovis Court without a retinue of servants and a huge bill for repairs were impossibilities; so the widowed Mrs. Baring, her lovely Ursula, and a younger daughter, helpless through spinal disease, lived with one old servant in a little cottage which overlooked their ruined inheritance.

Tea was over, and Ursula knelt by the invalid's sofa. "Nora, darling, it is so hard, so hard!" she sobbed, leaning her head against her sister's hand. How tenderly that gentle hand caressed her!

"Take heart, my dearest, something will happen yet to help you!"

Ursula raised her tearful face with an attempt at a smile.

"Do you mean Dame Ursula's treasure?" at which Nora laughed softly, for nothing seemed further off than that. Now some fifty years before this date Clovis Court was the dwelling place of the rich Dame Ursula Baring. She amassed riches year by year for her only child, a son, who had gone abroad, and she meant to make him wealthy and prosperous on his return. One sad day Dame Ursula had tidings that her son was dead. She immediately became demented and lived in a wild sort of dream for a year, and then died suddenly. Then came news that the son had left a wife and little boy to mourn him, and search was made for the property. Previous to her death the old dame had converted all she could into money, and now not a penny piece could be found for her rightful heirs! The excitement became great, and certain dishonest and adventurous persons had surreptitiously raised and opened Dame Ursula's coffin, thinking she had tried to take her wealth with her; all in vain. In queer writing, done with her diamond ring on a window in her bed-room (the ring was missing now), were the words: "Time will show where my treasure lies."

At the end of fifty years her lovely great-granddaughter Ursula, could not wed the man she loved because he depended on the will of an uncle, and she had nothing. The widowed mother had allowed as many excavations to take place at Clovis Court as could happen without bringing down the walls; then she devoted herself with great thrift to living on the next to nothing she had, and interested herself in poultry, pigs, and repairing linen. She did not moan over her fortunes, and tried to make her girls cheerful and happy, succeeding admirably until that terrible fellow "Love" appeared.

Guy Norman was packed off to the Continent just as the dull winter days set in. Ursula could not bear to think of Christmas, and hated helping to make plum-puddings with a sore heart. She was so

pitiful in appearance one day that Nora begged her to go for a walk, and not make the pudding salt with tears!

Glad to escape, Ursula hurried out into the wintry road. Everything looked dull and grey, and the girl after walking briskly for a time, turned by a side path into the garden of the deserted court. She wandered past the stately windows; then, with a natural inclination for everything as dismal as herself, she resolved to explore the old house. Fetching a key, she let herself in and paused a moment, startled by the echo of her own footfall in the weird silence; then she passed boldly on, determined to see old Dame Ursula's room. A quaint, low-roofed place, with lattice windows—an old four-post bedstead still stood there with faded, damp hangings of blue. Our Ursula was earnestly gazing on the lines engraved on the window, "Time will show where my treasure lies," when she saw a herd of cattle getting into the garden through the broken wall. There was not much to spoil, truly, but a sense of order made Ursula resolve to try and dismiss the intruders.

Quickly she ran out into the passage and sped down-stairs; seizing her umbrella she valiantly waved it as she appeared in the garden, and great consternation occurred. The cattle ran hither and thither, and none turned towards the gap in the wall. They ran against each other and everything else, but finally they were induced to go, and Ursula, looking over the debris of a battle-field where she had come off victorious, found that the old sun-dial was broken down. In real sorrow—for this had been a trysting spot where Guy and she had passed many a pleasant "greeting fair"—she ran towards it: then stopped and turned pale with excitement. There was a large hollow beneath where the sun-dial had stood, and in it were mouldy-looking bags and boxes!

It was getting dusk now, and Ursula ran swiftly home. "Mother—Nora—leave your puddings! Come, mother, to the court, for the—the—treasure is found!" The speech ended in sobs and laughter. Mrs. Baring and Nora thought she was demented, and looked solemnly at each other. Only the old servant shrewdly asked:

"And where is it, Miss Ursula, dear?"

"Under the sun-dial; some cows knocked it down."

"Time," cried Nora excitedly, "'time will show,' the old dame said. Oh, mother, Martha, go at once."

And they went—and found such riches as they had never dreamed of. All the country called at the cottage, the cruel uncle recalled the luckless lover, a marriage took place while mistletoe boughs were hanging still green, and now Guy and Ursula have settled to a country life, and Ursula takes personal delight in her dairy. Her husband declares she is in danger of actually worshipping the cow, in oriental fashion, so great is her gratitude for the discovery of Dame Ursula's Treasure.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

CLEON.

IN commencing this sketch of some of my earlier years, I feel like an artist who takes up his pencil to draw an old picture from memory. The outlines stand forth clear and distinct: they are too closely intermingled with my after life to have faded in any way from memory: but whether the delicate shading of thought and feeling will come back at my call, remains to be seen. There is, however, one face about whose every feature my pencil must so love to linger that other neighbouring objects may connect themselves with it, and thus help to form the whole.

I well remember that first evening at St. Russell's when some score lads, myself among them, had grouped themselves in all sorts of free-and-easy attitudes around the wide fire-place at one end of the old entrance-hall. It was a breathing-space, when the lessons for the next day were done and we were waiting for supper. There was a confused, but by no means harmonious din of many voices; from the shrill treble of the little ten-year-old lad, who had just begun his school life, to the deeper bass of the senior boy, who looked, with a feeling of regret mingling with his ambitions for the future, on the little world where he had fought his battles and won his victories.

It was a time when individual character, as yet unshackled by the restraints of after life, showed itself freely. In the warmest place and most comfortable position, half sat and half lay Reginald Crawdon, the longest, laziest, and what did not count much there, the greatest aristocrat in the school: a lad whom everybody liked: from the youngest boy who probably worshipped him, and would come to him in all his scrapes, to the head master himself, who quieted the scruples of conscience at work not got out of him by reflecting that the stored-up energies which assuredly were sleeping within were only waiting the more powerful circumstances of after life to develop.

On the opposite side of the hearth stood Bolton, a lad whom I may most readily describe as being the antipodes of Crawdon. He was that most hateful of all school-boy characters—a bully—with every attribute belonging to that character. There was not a boy in the school but disliked him, and, unfortunately for his peace, there was always ample opportunity for revenge in his easily-provoked temper. He had a most jealous regard for his own dignity, and the slightest ridicule would send him into a fit of ungovernable rage. This weakness, of course, was often taken advantage of, and to work Bolton up to boiling-point was the occasion of keen enjoyment to not a few. The night when I commence my story, he had been having a stiff round with a lad whom we had christened Tommyhawk—in

consideration both of his general appearance and precocious sharpness—and he had come off decidedly worsted.

The whole lot of us had been interested by the tidings that a new boy was coming in the middle of the term. He was expected that evening, and there were many conjectures as to who he was and where he came from, for no information on these points had reached us.

Bolton, however, professed to have heard part of a conversation between the Doctor and one of the masters, in which no very favourable allusions were made to the new-comer. His information was received for the most part with a curious interest; but there were a few, and amongst them Crawdon, Tommyhawk, and myself, who coupled the vagueness of his report with his well-known jealousy of any stranger, and were inclined to look upon this as one of his many fabrications. I suppose our faces must have betrayed us, for he launched into still stronger abuse of the unknown boy, and possibly said more in his growing anger than he at first intended. I had been sitting in a quiet corner with a book, and until the discussion grew hot had not paid much attention to it.

My natural disposition generally prompted me to keep outside all rows, if I could honourably do so; but to-night, the absurdity and injustice of the whole affair, besides the strong suspicion that Bolton had been colouring the Doctor's words to suit his own purpose, roused me to unwonted heat. I was just turning to give expression to my feeling, when there was a sound of carriage-wheels outside. The door was opened, we heard a low, clear voice give some directions to the driver, and then—on the door-step, with the dim light of the hall-lamp falling full on his face and figure—stood the stranger.

I often thought afterwards of the peculiar hush that fell on us boys. Even Crawdon seemed to lose his look of lazy indifference as he gazed curiously and earnestly at the new-comer. As for me, my thoughts wandered off to the realm of myths, and I began wondering what form Apollo really did take in the imagination of those beauty-loving old heathens!

He was a somewhat tall boy, well-built, with a regal head and shoulders that instinctively impressed you with a sense of power. We were all struck, I think, by the intense pride and haughtiness of his face. It appeared in every feature. In the evidently natural curve of his lip as he answered some enquiries which one of the masters was putting to him, and then in the cool steady look which he turned on us boys before going to the Doctor; a look which made most of the others drop their eyes and become suddenly conscious that they had been staring very hard. But strangely—for in most cases I should have been the first to follow their example—my gaze seemed riveted upon him, and our eyes met for what could in reality have been only a second. Yet it seemed longer, and somehow I felt as though we were not quite strangers after it.

Of course there was a strong re-action after he had gone. Both his looks and manner were the subject of free comment, and the general opinion was not favourable. Even Crawdon's good-nature failed him. He admitted the fineness of the face, but said there was an expression about it which was certainly not inviting. Tommyhawk suggested to me in a low aside, that there would be some fine rows now we had got another temper to match Bolton's, and he thought the latter would get the worst of it; the new fellow looked as though he might prove a risky customer to tackle. Most of the other boys in one way or another echoed the same sentiment. There had been a something in his look which had roused a general spirit of rebellion.

I listened almost in silence, for I could not join in the conversation. It was impossible to deny the justice of the remarks made, and yet I felt a strange leaning towards the other side. It might be some lingering resentment of Bolton's first attack, or a natural weakness for siding with the minority, but I certainly had a presentiment that in any of the future disturbances, I should take the part of the new-comer.

Bolton expressed his intention of putting the fellow down at once, so as to save trouble afterwards, and Crawdon was advising him to wait awhile until he knew better what he had to deal with, when the stranger himself walked down the hall with one of the masters. The latter just introduced him as Cleon Stanley, and went away.

Our greetings met with but scant ceremony. The boy certainly answered them, but his replies were curt, and his eyes meanwhile took a swift comprehensive glance at the faces of his future companions, ending up with my own. As our looks met for a second time, I thought his became keen and searching as though he would read my soul to see whether he might trust me. My face must have answered him, for there flashed a sudden, softer, better light in his eyes as he turned away.

He moved towards a vacant seat near the fire, evidently meaning to take it; but Bolton, with a pretended shiver, slipped into it himself, remarking that it was an awfully cold night, and really that was the only warm place in the hall.

Cleon Stanley looked at him for a second, as though he would see whether the rudeness were intentional; but as Bolton's face gave no clue, he turned away and sat down on the other side of the hearth, taking a book from his pocket, and beginning to read by the fire-light.

I had been strongly tempted to interfere with what I knew to be intended rudeness, but the risk of rousing Bolton still more and making him do worse: and a doubt too, of whether the new fellow would thank me for my help: prevented me.

The usual talk and laughter went on again with most of the boys, but a few of us seemed, somehow, to be waiting for the next move. There was a something in the air which we all felt must come sooner

or later, and the expression of Bolton's face seemed to promise that it would not be much later.

The flicker of the firelight fell on the book Cleon was reading as he sat with his head half-turned away. I quietly studied the face, thinking that many would not care to rouse the spirit which had left its marks there. But fools will run where angels fear to tread, and Bolton's familiar would evidently give him no rest until he had made good his promise.

With another exclamation at the coldness of the night, and the poor chance there was of keeping warm if we let the fire out, he took up a pan of coals which stood near, and throwing the contents on the fire, completely extinguished every particle of light.

Cleon turned and looked his tormentor full in the face, and there was a sound of contempt more than of anger in his voice as he said: "Is there anything else you would like besides my seat and my light?" Then, turning to the others: "I should be sorry to cause any disturbance here the first night. If I had known the sort of welcome you gave to strangers, I would have consulted my own inclinations and kept away, but I supposed common civility would be expected. I see you dispense with it. That won't hurt me; and all I ask is to be let alone. I think even your amiable friend would find it the safer plan to take a hint in time."

Whilst speaking he had risen to his feet and stood facing us with one arm resting carelessly on the low chimney-piece.

There was silence for a few seconds when he had done. I think most of them felt a little ashamed, even though something in his speech roused their anger.

Then Crawdon got up and said he believed it was not their usual custom to insult a stranger, he thought an apology was due from Bolton for his uncourteous behaviour, and he hoped he would give it at once and put an end to the affair. I got up to second him, and told Bolton what I thought of his ungenerous conduct to a stranger.

The hot indignation which had been gradually growing within me, seemed to carry me out of myself, and the others were not much more surprised than I was at the height it had gained. As I got up from my seat, I had glanced at Cleon, and his look of proud indifference had wavered for a moment, but I did not look again. When I had done speaking, a feeling of awkwardness at the position in which I had placed myself—the uncertainty as to how the stranger might take my extreme championship—came over me, and I walked up to an open window at the far end of the hall. I could hear in the distance, how Bolton was forced into making a lame apology; how Stanley put both the apology and the need for it on one side, as though such an one as Bolton could not possibly offend him. Then the short firm steps crossed the hall, a hand was on my shoulder, and I turned to look up into what I instantly felt was *my friend's* face.

"Thank you for taking my side to-night," he said, in a low, quiet

voice. "I did not deserve it. I had no right to let that fellow provoke me and spoil your evening. He was not worth it. But I am afraid there is hot blood in my veins, which will never help me to stand interference. However, I can scarcely regret it all, as it has shown me a friend. But I must honestly tell you that it may not always be safe to take my side; perhaps you would be wiser never to do so again!" Yet, while he said the words, the pressure of his hand on my shoulder grew firmer, and there was a half-proud, half-longing look in his eyes.

I could not quite tell at the time what was coming over me. A feeling of great sympathy for this isolated boy, whom I had known only a few minutes, filled my heart, and even brought tears to my eyes, as I said hurriedly: "I shall always take your side," and then walked away, afraid to yield myself to this new and strange influence.

The words I then uttered, and the vow that was then registered on my soul, proved the chisel which afterwards shaped my whole life. It did not always influence outward circumstances, but its power was supreme: entire in that immortal life of thought and feeling of which outward circumstances are but auxiliaries. We yielded to each other that night a friendship which has never once wavered through long years. It seemed strange afterwards that my life could ever have been complete without him, so naturally did he take and so faithfully has he kept the chief place in it since.

The other boys, of course, used to chaff us, and would have called us as usual David and Jonathan, if they could only have found in Cleon the least resemblance to either; but they could not, so we were rechristened David and Goliath; and I believe the prevailing opinion was that we had about as much in common as they and an equal right to go together.

Those happy two years at school do not seem so far away as they really are, because I experienced more in that short time than I have done in many other years of my life. But there is one period which claims precedence over the rest because of its great and painful interest to me, both at the time and long afterwards. It was my last Christmas there, and about a dozen of us had gone in for a final examination, which would make the successful competitor the head of the school, and also considerably smooth his way to college in regard to pecuniary matters, as several grants would fall to his share.

I do not think the latter motive often influenced us; it was more the honour, the glory of the thing. To be head boy at St. Russell's was no trifling matter.

Opinions were divided as to who would head the list, though the majority were for Cleon and myself. We were certain to be bracketed together, the boys said: they were sure neither of us would have it, if it were not divided.

However, we all worked our hardest. My parents were very anxious that I should get it. I was their only son, and my father

had taken it at the same school years before; so he wanted, he said, to keep it in the family. Cleon was the only one who seemed to have no desire for it, though it was so likely to fall to his share. The necessary work required no extra exertion on his part; much of it appeared merely pastime to him; he was acknowledged, even by those who disliked him, to be the cleverest boy in the school.

I have said by those who disliked him. I scarcely think there was one there who liked, or even dared to like him. His manner had, to the rest, lost not one iota of its first hauteur and pride. Even the masters, ay, and the Doctor himself, were treated with a respectful indifference which rendered anything like familiarity impossible. They were compelled to keep a certain distance, and I think all regarded him as a puzzle hard to unravel. He commanded their respect always with their dislike.

But there was one there who felt the keenest hatred towards him, and that one was Bolton. The ridicule and contempt of the first evening had never been forgotten, and his rage had ever been kept at boiling point by the utter impossibility of revenge. Cleon always looked upon him as so totally unworthy of notice, that whatever Bolton in his spite and malice could invent was allowed to pass without the slightest comment. Beyond a certain point he never went, for there was a sleeping lion in Cleon which the bravest never cared to arouse; and Bolton was both a coward and a sneak.

For a week or two before the examination he suddenly dropped all his minor unpleasantness, and we concluded, as he was one of the competitors, that he had found something better to occupy his thoughts. It was a time of real, earnest work, and the nearer the day approached the more we tried to cram, until I believe the Doctor was thankful for some of us when the preparatory work was over.

Most of the papers were written by the Doctor and different masters, excepting one on mathematics, which had been prepared specially by one of the foremost mathematicians of the day, and a special prize was to go with it. It was the first time such a thing had occurred, and of course added double zest to our efforts.

Cleon laughed at my eagerness, and said it was quite unnecessary for me to work so hard; no one else was likely to get it. I told him it only depended on his will, though I believed there was a possibility of Bolton's succeeding.

"Not without he gets a chance of seeing the original in the Doctor's study and copies the answer," was his reply, as we both went in to prayers.

I should probably have forgotten his words in a few moments, but just as we passed into the room, I saw Seldon, one of Bolton's chief friends, standing close to us, half-hidden by the shadow of the door. From the expression on his face he had evidently heard all we had said. For some time I felt uncomfortable, but by the next day, which was *the* day, I had forgotten all about it.

About ten the next morning we all took our places in the long school-room. The desks were arranged at measured distances, and only one boy was to occupy each, to prevent anything like copying. The Doctor might have had some suspicion of Cleon and me, for we sat at opposite ends of the room. Of course there was perfect quiet, and nothing whatever to distract our thoughts.

I finished the home papers and then took up the all-important problem. The first glance showed me that I should have no difficulty in working it, and I knew it would be equally easy to Cleon; for, curiously enough, we had hit on something similar the day before. Cleon had made out a problem of his own, to find employment, he said, for the unnecessary energy I was throwing into the work, and it was strangely like the one given us. Of course I set to work, delighted at our prospective success, and had just finished, when I started to feel a hand on my shoulder and to hear one of the masters bidding me go to the Doctor's study at once.

I do not know why it was, but I seemed to hear a troubled echo after his words; and the shadow of a malicious smile which I saw flicker across Bolton's face as I rose to obey, did not lessen the impression.

Like someone just awakening out of a pleasant dream and then passing off into one of equal unpleasantness, I walked to the Doctor's room. Not a suspicion of the truth occurred to me, as I knocked at the door. "Come in," was the reply, and I entered.

The Doctor was standing by a table, and with him a gentleman who was a stranger to me, and the expression of whose face was one of unmitigated contempt. The Doctor's bore the same, but there was a strong element of sorrow mingled with it. In his hand was a book, which I instantly recognised as the one in which Cleon and I had worked out all our problems, and which I had last seen in Cleon's room.

"This book is yours, Vincent?" said the Doctor, in a painfully distinct voice.

"Yes, sir, it is," I replied; for it lay open with my name, Frederic Vincent, written in Cleon's bold hand at the bottom of the page.

"You were using it yesterday?" he continued.

"Yes, sir," I answered, feeling more and more perplexed, and wondering, in a vague sort of way, what was coming next. But my wonderment was soon to be turned into a certainty that seemed at first to make the blood stand still in my veins, and then rush madly on in hottest indignation.

The Doctor opened the book at another place, and taking up a paper which was lying between the leaves, he unfolded it, and showed me the answer to our prize problem, accurately worked out, and bearing the signature of the gentleman who had drawn it up.

A dim idea of the truth began to dawn on my mind; but still I was so very sure I had had no hand in the matter, and it seemed so utterly

impossible that they should ever suspect *me* of such a thing, that a troubled surprise was my uppermost feeling. Both gentlemen looked at me as though waiting for an answer.

"I know nothing of this; I have never seen this paper before," I said, looking up.

The Doctor's brow grew heavier as he replied: "The sin of deceit is quite enough to lie at your door without adding that of untruth to it. If the evidence had not been so complete, *you* would never have been suspected, Vincent. This paper was missed, and found, accidentally, in your book. Yet I should not say accidentally; these things are never the result of accident. It was not by mere chance that Bolton mistook this book for his own when he came to show me some work I had given him to do, and which he thought would be in here. Oh! Vincent, what mad impulse possessed you?"

I had stood all this time as though turned to stone, but the silence roused me.

"It's a lie, sir! I have never seen that paper until now, and it has been placed in my book by hands that had first taken it from here."

"Silence!" was the reply. "You forget yourself. The facts speak only too clearly for themselves. There is one test we can put it to: your paper shall be sent for and we will see if there is any resemblance between the two."

"I can tell you," I answered quickly, feeling utterly helpless under such adverse circumstances. "My paper will be found just the same, but for all that it is no copy!"

"That is conclusive," was the Doctor's answer. "You are quick at mathematics, Vincent, but that problem was certainly more than you could possibly work in the short space of time you have had. You had better go to your room. The whole affair is inexpressibly painful to me, and it does not end here: there is the other half sheet of this paper somewhere, but in whose possession we have yet to know."

I left the room, grieved, indignant, and utterly bewildered. That someone had wickedly planned this disgrace for me, I was obliged to believe, and yet it seemed so thoroughly cruel and uncalled-for, that I hardly cared, even in thought, to lay it at anyone's door. And though the fact of Bolton's finding it would keep running through my mind, I could scarcely tolerate such a suspicion even of him.

I spent a most wretched hour in my room. My thoughts were in a complete tumult. I wondered what they would think at home, whether they would believe my side; though if the apparent facts of the case had not been so strong against me I should never have doubted.

Then came the thought of Cleon, and with it a shadow of peace. I felt, I knew, he would keep his faith in me. I was just longing to hear his indignant voice say, "It's all a lie, Fred, and I'll soon know who is its author," when there was a sound of footsteps on the stairs. The examination was over and the boys were coming out. I listened

for Cleon's step, but it didn't come. There was a heavy shuffle instead, and presently a knock at my door. Then the handle was turned, and Seldon, Bolton's friend, entered.

"What do you want here?" I asked in an uncivil tone. For answer he gave me the full development of the evil smile I had seen dawning on Bolton's face; then replied:

"I only came to say you needn't feel so awfully cut up; the Doctor wants to see you presently, and will make it all right."

"What!" I exclaimed, feeling as though I had passed into some new creation. "What do you say? Have they really found out who did it?"

"Yes," he answered, that smile expanding more and more.

"Well! Why can't you speak? Who was the cowardly sneak?"

"Cleon," he replied with a low "Ha! ha!" that would have become a very demon.

How I looked at that moment, I cannot say, but I have a vague recollection of feeling as though every force in my nature had suddenly received tenfold its usual strength, and all had joined together in one mighty rush against one person, and that Seldon. Whether I threw him out of the room and then kicked him downstairs, or kicked him out of the room and threw him downstairs I do not know, and scarcely knew then. But it was one of the two, for there he lay at the bottom of the first flight, and did not offer to stir; not even when I had cooled down enough to go and see if he were hurt. Crawdon came up at that moment, but his face bore no look of congratulation, and he seemed rather to hesitate when he saw me, as though he would have preferred going back; but he couldn't well do that; and, besides, he had observed Seldon.

"What's amiss with him?" he asked, walking up.

"Why, I believe I kicked him downstairs, the wretch—but he was scarcely worth the effort, and I don't think I should have done it if he had not said what he did about Cleon. What do you think he dared to say?" I asked, looking at Crawdon, whose manner struck me as strange. "What do you suppose was his and Bolton's last invention?"

Instead of answering, he gave Seldon another kick which soon brought him to his feet, and before he had time to speak he laid his hand heavily on his shoulder and said: "If you speak another word, you coward, I'll send you down the next flight. Take your fiendish pleasure in gloating over another's misery somewhere else—you shall not get it here."

There was something in Crawdon's indignant look which frightened him; he shook the hand off his shoulder, and walked rapidly away. We both watched him out of sight, and stood a minute longer as though unwilling to reopen the conversation. At last Crawdon put his hand on my arm, and with a new hesitancy in his voice, and still without looking me in the face, said:

"Shall we go into your room, Vincent? There is something I must tell you."

When we were inside and the key was turned in the lock, he walked up to the window and stood with his back to me whilst he told me. Told me that about half-an-hour after I had been called out of the school-room the Doctor entered it and said that the prize paper had been taken out of his study and copied. Half the sheet he had found, the other half was to be searched for. Everyone there must turn out his pockets as a preliminary step, and those who were innocent would overlook what at another time might seem an indignity, for the sake of discovering the guilty one.

Each boy obeyed, beginning at my end of the room. No paper was found until Cleon's desk was reached, and *he* drew out of his pocket the other half-sheet, and gave it with a look of unmitigated surprise to the Doctor. But that surprise was apparently increased when the Doctor spoke.

"This proves what I was still hoping to find untrue. Frederic Vincent's name in his own hand-writing is here; the other half-sheet was found in his book. His examination paper is almost an exact copy of it—now show me yours. I had not thought that the friendship between you would lead to mutual evil instead of good."

Crawdon said that as Cleon gathered the full meaning of the Doctor's words, the look of surprise on his face was replaced by one of fixed determination, as though some sudden purpose had entered his mind which he would hold to at all hazards. He handed his paper to the Doctor, and said:

"You will find that equally like the original, but you have not arrived at the truth of the matter yet. Vincent did not take that paper, nor has he ever seen it. I took it and I put the other half-sheet in his book."

The Doctor stood with the rest of them speechless with surprise for awhile; then said, as a new thought struck him:

"But Vincent's name is here in his own hand-writing; it must be as I said: you are both implicated."

A shadow of pain, Crawdon said, passed over Cleon's face; then he went on in that clear, low voice of his which could be heard all down the room:

"I wrote Vincent's name on that paper." And he took out his pocket book and showed many copies of my signature, quite as good as that on the paper.

But the Doctor refused to believe it, he said there could be no possible explanation of it, excepting that he had wished to shield himself at the expense of his friend. And then with a passing look of horror on his face, as though the very thought were hideous to him, Cleon hesitated a moment and then declared it was so; he had done it to shield himself.

When Crawdon had finished speaking, he turned to me with a look

of pity that nearly drove me wild. I knew, of course, that it was all a mistake; Cleon had done this to shield me. I would stop him as he came upstairs, and we would talk it all over. And then I heard his step. In an instant I had unlocked the door and flung it wide.

"Cleon! Cleon! come in," I cried, as he reached the top of the stairs. "I want to talk this affair over, and find out who has been to blame. Don't you think ——"

But he passed quickly by me, his head bent and his face pale, and I heard him turn the key of his door when he got inside. Then I asked Crawdon to leave me to think it all over, and I assured him as he was going that my confidence in Cleon was unshaken and would remain so until everything was cleared up, or even if things never were cleared up. And I think I spoke the truth, but it became a hard trial. The Doctor sent for me to his study, and seemed fully assured of my innocence; but about the way in which that innocence had been proved he said little; perhaps to spare my feelings, perhaps, because he could understand it as little as I.

Towards evening I went down into the hall. Cleon was standing by the window, on the very spot where I had that first night promised to take his side. His words about its not always being safe, flashed across my mind again, but directly following them came the remembrance of my inward vow, that, come what would, we must hold together. In an instant I should have been at Cleon's side, but he knew my step, and before I had time to utter a word, he turned and walked swiftly past me, and away upstairs into his room.

It was so sudden, so unexpected, that I felt stupefied and made no attempt to follow him, but stood by the window, looking out on the frost and the moonlight, until prayers called us all together.

The prizes were to be given at the end of the week, and then in a few more days we should all be at home. I was going on to Oxford after the holidays. Cleon, I knew, was going away for good as well, but he was not going to college, and our paths would separate.

That was without doubt the most miserable week I have ever spent in my life. Cleon and I never once spoke to each other. He avoided me all the time and yet I often saw on his cold, proud face a look of intense pain when I passed close by him, or came anywhere near him. Even his lip would quiver. But he always turned away his head or moved in another direction. Towards the end of the week this got almost intolerable, and I felt there must be a change of some kind soon, or I should break down altogether. No doubt the physical re-action consequent on the over-mental exertion of the past few months had done something to weaken my nerve.

On the Thursday Bolton got a letter, saying that his father was taken suddenly and dangerously ill, and he must hasten home at once. There was much wondering as to whether he would be able to get back in time for the distribution of the prizes, but on Friday the Doctor had a black-edged envelope brought to him whilst in the

school-room. It contained the announcement of the death of Bolton's father and a note from Bolton himself. He took out the announcement and read it to us, saying a few words of sympathy on behalf of the absent boy. Then we saw him open the note and commence reading it. Suddenly he made some quick exclamation, glanced quickly at Cleon, who was sitting with his head bent over a book, and left the room.

Of course everyone wondered what was up. We all hoped something might be said at dinner-time, but the Doctor never made his appearance; and as that afternoon had been fixed for distributing the prizes, and the parents and friends of the pupils were expected to be present, we concluded his time might have been fully occupied.

The appointed hour came at last, and we all gathered in the two large school-rooms, the partitions between them having been removed and both thrown into one. One end was crowded with visitors, and at the other sat the Doctor and the different masters, a table filled with costly books before them. On a stand by itself were two first prizes, the meaning of which we had yet to learn.

We boys sat in long rows to the right and left of the Doctor, the candidates for the final exam. half on one side and half on the other. I do not know whether it was intentional or not, but all our places had been pointed out to us, and Cleon and I were placed directly opposite each other. I was surprised to see him there at all, but the Doctor had sent word that he wished it. We were all sitting waiting for the usual preliminaries, when the Doctor got up, and, after a little hesitation, said he had that morning received a letter which had given him both pain and pleasure and also somewhat perplexed him. The writer had requested that it might be read aloud, and he was now going to accede to that request. The circumstances connected with it would not be known to anyone outside the school, but should be explained afterwards.

Then to our surprise he took from his pocket Bolton's note, and without further preface, read it through. The intense excitement that prevailed on all sides may well be imagined, but it was in no-wise lessened when the Doctor had finished reading. Bolton began the note by alluding to his recent loss, and speaking of the better influence it had had on his thoughts and feelings. He confessed his wicked hatred of myself and Cleon, and his fixed determination to end our friendship, if possible; and to that end he had contrived the plan of taking the original copy of the problem out of the study, putting one half in my book, and after copying my signature on the other, contriving to get it in the pocket of a coat he knew Cleon would be likely to wear on the day of the examination.

He saw his plan succeed, but in a manner very different from his anticipations. Cleon's noble resolve to take all the blame on himself and shield his friend, even at the risk of being thought unfaithful, had shown his own conduct in darker colours, and proved too, that

a friendship, such as that which existed between Cleon and myself, would take a stronger power than he possessed to sever. He concluded with many humble, and I believe real expressions of regret for his conduct, and asked the forgiveness of those chiefly concerned in it.

I remember after it was over, feeling one great thrill of pleasure, then I knew the boys were all longing to get up and cheer. The Doctor cleared his voice again, and taking up one of the prize volumes, he called to Cleon to come up. I watched him cross the room with all his usual quiet indifferent manner, but without once looking at me. Then the Doctor's voice which seemed to sound a very long way off, said :

"This prize is yours, Cleon ; the other is for Vincent. We have decided to award a prize to both of you. Your papers were too equal to make any distinction possible. Your friendship has been noble and generous, though the highest motives can never make it right to tell a lie. But I feel I cannot blame you as perhaps I ought."

Here he suddenly broke off, and three loud cheers for David and Goliath rang through the room, but even they sounded far away to me. Someone said, "Look at Vincent !" Then I saw Cleon drop all the books on the floor, spring forward, and that was all.

Those who stood near told me afterwards that the coldness and pride died out of his face, and his lip quivered painfully, but he said never a word ; only lifted me up as gently as my mother might have done, and carried me out of the room, setting his foot straight on the top of one of the prizes as he went.

When I came to myself I was lying on my bed, and the first thing I saw was Cleon's face, and the look that was on it. And then—it may have been girlish, I dare say it was, but I could not have helped myself—I threw both arms round his neck, and sobbed till the bed shook again. He kept perfectly quiet for a long time, and then said in a low, soft voice, which was never heard except when he was greatly moved : "I say, old fellow, I don't want to be drowned."

That roused me, I released him and tried to sit up alone, but found I could not ; the strain of the past week had been too much ; my strength gave way, and I had to drop my head on the pillow again.

For nearly a week after that I lay there, with Cleon for my nurse. The Doctor wrote home and told them there was no occasion for alarm ; I had overtaxed my strength, but would be all right again in a day or two, and so we were left alone together. At the end of the week, we said Good-bye, and each for the time went his separate way, but strong in a friendship that the chances and changes of life—and they were many—kept firm and steadfast as a house whose foundations are built upon a rock.

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